

# Dark Kingdom OF JADE



A Dark Kingdoms Sourcebook  
for Wraith: The Oblivion



# Dark Kingdom OF JADE



by Richard Dakan and Markleford Freidman



Give up sainthood, renounce wisdom,

And it will be a hundred times better for everyone.

Give up kindness, renounce morality,

And men will rediscover filial piety and love.

Give up ingenuity, renounce profit,



And bandits and thieves will disappear.

These three are outward forms alone; they are not sufficient in themselves.

It is more important

To see the simplicity,  
To realize one's true nature,  
To cast off selfishness  
And temper desire.

– Lao Tsu, Tao Te Ching

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Because of the mature themes involved, reader discretion is advised.



# Dark Kingdom OF JADE

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# Ghost Story: A Prelude to Hell

**I**heard a multi-toned clash and the grinding of great gears. Cool air hit me, fresh after the fetid heat of the pits.

The cold-hot sting of a spear tip prodded into my back, biting deep into something they had slapped on the back of my left shoulder in the Village of Kuei-Go. I didn't turn around, didn't struggle. Either would be a useless waste of energy I desperately needed to foil them at whatever game this was.

"Hshuin Wai Lei, you are sentenced to wander the Maze until you find an exit, be it through the Gate which is open for you or through the Void. You are sentenced to this punishment for disobedience to your family, for willfulness against your elders and for treachery against the Empire. If, however, you reach the Gate, you will have proven your worthiness in accordance with the Emperor's will."

I walked forward. The blindfold was roughly yanked from my head. The chains fell from where they had been wrapped

all up my forearms and around my legs just above the knees. The chains slithered away with a soft hiss and a burn against the inside of my naked thigh that made me set my jaw so I wouldn't shiver. I would rather...

I laughed as I walked through the Gate. I couldn't prefer dying like some court lady. I was already dead.

The Gate clashed closed behind me with a sound that echoed from all four sides of the courtyard. There was a murmur of voices from the other side of the bristling Trees, and glimpses of white eyes, white hair and white skin.

I could hear the bookmakers screaming, "A wager on the Laughing Girl!! A thousand that with such luck she makes it to a Gate!! Wager! Wager! Wager here! Face so much, heart so much, how could she lose?" The voice was drowned out by takers.

I pushed my thigh-long hair back from my face, hair that in the land of the living had promised me the life of a seeress, just as long, beautiful hands promised a boy the life of a scholar. But that promise was broken, along with my body, on a dusty desert road.

I looked at the gleaming walls, the Gate nothing more than branches bristling in all directions as it closed behind me. All around me were glittering blades of a dead white. The guards called the stuff White Jade, and it belonged in this dead-white hell. Here, though, the color seemed purely clean, like metal from a forge.

The twisted, scarred face of a demon guard appeared at the top of the Gate. I started running further down the path as an arrow hit the ground where my feet had been. The fletching of it burned and smoked like acid. I knew the arrowhead would do worse, much worse, even to my dead flesh.

I ran for a few yards, taking a cleared path amid the Trees. My arm brushed against a branch, and I gasped as dark ichor spread from a neat cut. Even that light a touch, the Tree spun like a weathervane in a storm. I looked more closely at the "branch" of the Tree. It was a honed blade. I looked around me, and each and every branch was honed and glittering. Tentatively, I touched the flat of a blade, pushing lightly, and I had to leap back as the whole Tree whirred around. As they spun, the blades cut the air into a many-toned dirge, singing.

The Maze. They had said I was to wander the Maze. The Trees must be the Maze's walls, and somewhere, the guard had said, there was a way out. I remembered what my grandmother had told me of mazes, and how to escape them all one had to do was follow one hand's wall, no matter where it led. So I walked the Maze with the Trees continuously on my right hand, the lucky hand. It could not be that easy, could it?

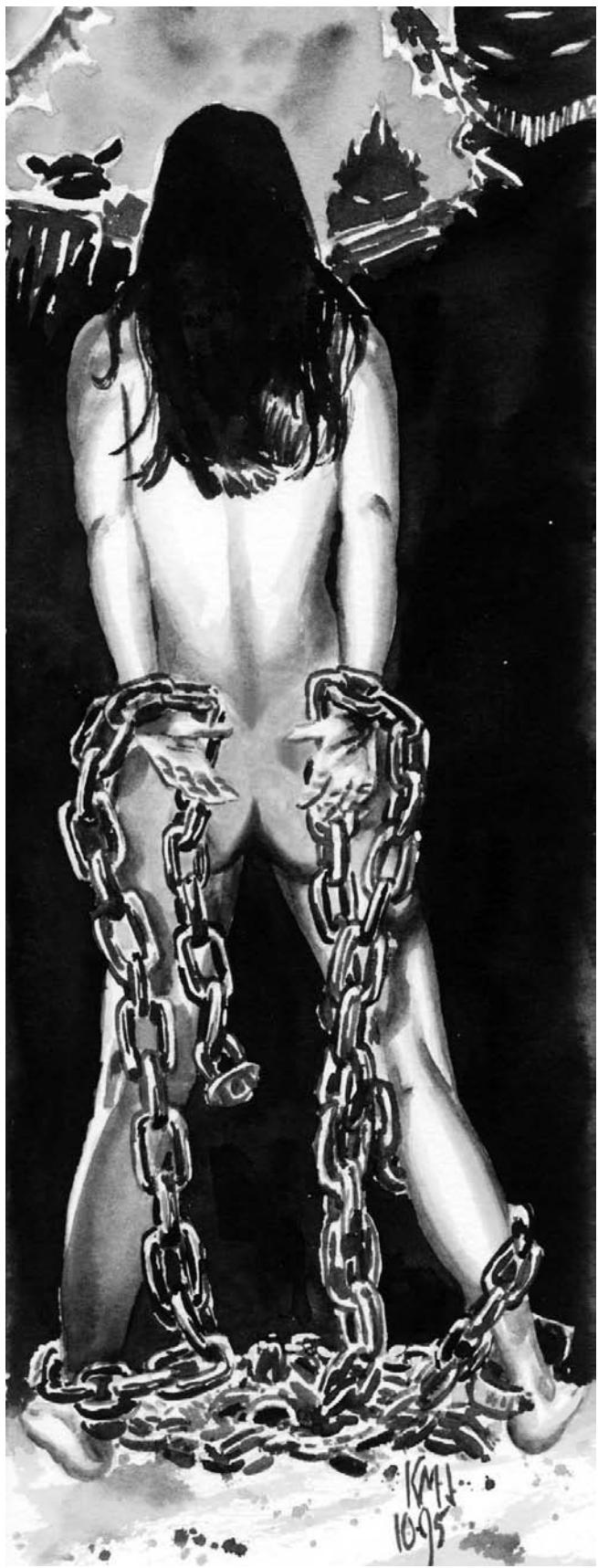
I kept going, occasionally turning the Trees to hear them sing, to see how their branches would intersect the paths between them. There was backtracking, of course, but I was not frantic because I had a plan, and knew that it would not fail.

Suddenly a bell sounded and with the noise came the din of the Gates. In the ominous silence that followed I heard the hunting cry of *kuei-go*. I was right. It wasn't going to be easy. I quickened my steps.

The stench of ancient fear, despair and hatred were what warned me as the *kuei-go* attacked. I leaped to the right, even as the Tree I had been standing next to shuddered under the impact of the beast. It tore itself free from the blades with a wet sucking sound, and glared at me, wounded. The Tree had laid open the left side of its head, slicing through the muzzle clear down to what could have been bone. The green jade barding that encased its skull was sliced apart and dangled along with much of its jaw. Pain in its eyes, the creature staggered towards me.

Green. Color was so rare here, and yet the *kuei-go*'s eyes were the color of the muzzle. I reached forward and pulled the device free, and it moaned as its eyes dulled in confusion. Within seconds they were black, the same as any other wraith's. With human eyes the beast looked down on itself and screamed.

I staggered back at the near-human sound.



With a strange grace, the *kuei-go* whirled and leaped into the Tree it had just pulled itself away from. There was a report like a gunshot as the white blades pierced its frame. Then, as with the other wraiths whom I'd seen die on my path to Hell, the spirit faded, misted and disappeared into shadow.

There was a murmur from the crowd like the sound of the sea.

A single, slender branch fell with a soft thud to the ground where the *kuei-go* had lain. Bending carefully, I reached under the still-dripping branches and brought forth the blade by pressing my fingers onto the flat sides. After a moment of study, I took the jade muzzle and wrapped it around the wide end of the blade. When I had wrapped it as tightly as I could, I took a few practice swings with my new sword. It wasn't much of a weapon, but it was better than nothing.

There were probably more *kuei-go* in the Maze, so I moved warily, going wide around corners to avoid ambushes. At one intersection my precautions proved unnecessary as I could clearly hear the footsteps of a man running towards me. He turned the corner and we came face-to-face. He was as naked and as bruised as I, and his eyes showed white in panic. He screamed when he saw me, and bolted away down another path, his bare buttocks bouncing as he ran. I could hear the laughter of the crowd as he vanished, but the tittering died as the *kuei-go* that had been chasing him found me instead.

This one, however, was not as hasty as the first. It watched me with its narrowed green eyes. I stood in the center of the pathway. With one sword I would have to be centered. It came closer, but just beyond the range of the slender branch I held. It stared at me with those eerie eyes and panted its fetid breath at me.

Suddenly it tensed and rushed, and there was a scrabbling of claws and teeth as I swing wildly. Neither of us had hit anything, but its mouth was hanging open in a canine grin. It had merely feinted, seen what I was capable of, and found me to be easy prey.

I edged forward, and the beast took a step back, but not quickly enough. I lunged, not at the *kuei-go* itself, but rather at the side of its head. At first I thought I had missed completely, but then the muzzle, sliced cleanly, fell to the dust. Its eyes shone brightly for an instant, then dimmed to black. Tongue lolling, it examined itself with its new eyes and then gazed up at me. I tensed, preparing for a new attack, but it merely nodded its canine head and trotted off in the direction from which it had come.

A chorus of jeers and shouts came from the crowd, but their wishes were of no concern to me. I wasn't certain I liked the idea of a loose *kuei-go* at my back. Still, leaving it free seemed preferable to hunting it down.

The booing stopped, and the roar of the crowd's approval washed over me. Somewhere else in the Maze, there was screaming. This is what they were cheering for, not my triumph. The screams came again, weaker this time, from the direction



the frightened man had taken only seconds earlier. Even as I made up my mind to see what aid I could offer, the screaming faded to low moans. Cursing, I ran towards the sound.

I broke into a rough clearing. In contrast to the serene spinning of the Trees were the rough vertical jerkings of the remains of the man I had seen earlier. Impaled on a Tree, he bore the marks of a *kuei-go*'s jaws. The beast snarled with ichor-stained lips as I came in, but confident that I would not disturb it, returned to its grisly feast.

It ate until the man faded away. Then it turned towards me, green eyes glowing. Before either of us could act, a blade sang behind me. I turned, but too late as the spinning Tree tore at my flesh. Even as I fell, small fists beat at my back and head. I heard a woman's laugh, and then the snort of the charging *kuei-go*. The crowd went wild.

With blurry eyes I saw the *kuei-go* leaping at me. The woman – if woman she were and not some demon – was gone. I raised my makeshift sword in time to catch the beast on the point. The force of the impact drove the hilt of the jagged blade into my chest, but not deeply. I screamed as the dog clawed at my legs in its agony. Its jaws were scant inches from my face.

The pain threatened to overwhelm me. Since the weight and frenzy of the beast held the sword against my chest, I did not need my arms to keep it impaled, so I reached forward

and nearly lost a hand removing its muzzle. I sobbed and fell back, clutching the makeshift hilt with both hands. An eternal minute later, the beast stopped twitching and rolled to the dust. The jade muzzle tumbled free.

I sobbed and retched twice before I could so much as stand on my ravaged legs. The pieces of the muzzle had come apart, so I wrapped them around my left forearm as a sort of rough bracer. It seemed an inadequate defense.

The crowd murmured to a roar again, and more screams echoed between the Trees. I cursed the crowd and my fellow victims. Would this never stop?

Cursing my own morality, I hobbled in the direction of the noise. Not knowing if I could do anything, but, as usual, preferring the Void to not doing anything at all.

The next clearing was but a short distance away. In the center, a *kuei-go* squatted and tore at two bodes that leaked ichor and screamed. One was a woman, from the sound of her screams the same who had downed me in the other clearing. It looked as I entered, watching me through slitted, jade eyes. Still, wounded as I was, I must not have seemed a threat. With a growl, it returned to its feast.

Arrogant in its strength, the beast let me approach close enough to lunge. Falling, I thrust out with the sword and sliced the muzzle from its head. Without the blade as



crutch, I toppled to the ground even as the *kuei-go*'s eyes grew cold and dark. Its gaze met mine as I lay, prone, and in its eyes I saw madness.

A snarl rose from deep in its chest and it charged me. I could do nothing but raise my left arm and shove my jade-protected arm against its jaws. The impact flung me up and backwards, and I cried out as blades lanced through my hip and shoulder. My sword fell to the ground with a dull clang. The *kuei-go*'s jaws still gripped my dangling arm, but the jade of the muzzle did not break. For this I was thankful.

Like a lantern in the breeze I dangled. The pain was overwhelming. For a moment I wished I had simply saved myself and left this place, instead of being foolish enough to think I could help others.

Howls came from the crowd, rousing me from my pain-induced daze. A streak of black that resolved itself into the *kuei-go* that I had freed leaped onto my attacker and tore him from me. I became one with the audience, watching the strange combat between Bad Dogs. I found myself cheering, weakly, as the recent arrival tore out his opponent's throat and left him twitching in the dust. Knowing that the victor would now devour me, I closed my eyes to wait for the end. An instant later my nostrils were filled with the scent of *kuei-go*, very close.

A harsh hot panting breath bathed my breast, and I raised my head to give the beast better access to my throat. I wanted a faster death than the others had received.

Instead, I opened my eyes in shock as a warm, wet, soft touch caressed my cheek. The *kuei-go* laughed a nearly human chuckle at me, with lolling tongue and eyes wrinkled at the corners. The animal's jaws closed on my protected arm, gently, and pulled me from the Tree.

I fell to earth, screaming as the blades came out. The crowd voiced their approval as I lay there, hurting. A cold nose nudged me, and my savior licked my wounds. It then turned and nudged my sword back into reach, and did the same with the fallen muzzle of the beast it had just slain.

Slowly, I sat up, though the world spun and swayed around me. A voice in my head whispered that I should kill the beast beside me, that it was just saving me for later. I ignored it, and staggered to my feet. With more care than grace, I wound the pieces and thongs of the new muzzle around my right arm. With the Dog nuzzled against me, I began once more, slowly, to traverse the Maze, praying that I could find the Gate soon.

The Gate. I wondered what would await us there. The *kuei-go* would most likely be killed, and I put back in the pits. The Gate would be well guarded. But the alternative... there was no real alternative.

Take the mercy of the Emperor? There was no such thing. Especially for a traitor like myself. But there was no other way.

The *kuei-go* looked at me.





I patted him on the head. "Back the way I came," I said softly. His nose went to the ground and slowly, with his support, I hobbled along. Finally, we went the last straight course and, as I suspected, the Gate was now wide open.

In the Gate guardsmen awaited. They bound both me and my companion with the same stinging chains I had worn previously. My makeshift sword was bound to my back, and I was forced to my knees.

Then, as if upon a quiet word that all was safe, a glittering Imperial entourage emerged. Members of the procession flitted in like butterflies, each more beautiful than the last, with the final arrival the most brilliant of all. I pressed my forehead to the floor and did not dare look up.

"A most entertaining run, girl," said a surprisingly high voice. I did not make the mistake of looking up.

"I am pleased to please, your Holiness," I said, very softly.

A kick caught me where a blade had lanced through my shoulder. I screamed, and all around me tittering laughter flitted. The *kuei-go* growled, but knew better than to do much more.

"Do you wish to request a boon of me, girl?"

"Only as it pleases you." My voice shook with pain.

"Then exist, girl. You have earned it and all that you've brought out with you from the Maze," said that high voice. Then, just as calmly and dispassionately, that same voice said, "And give me the skin of the impudent *kuei-go* for a carpet, and have the rest made into an Eunuch for the game scores."

"No!" I screamed and struggled to break my bonds.

"Oh? So the girl has a request. Would you take the place of a mere beast?"

I sobbed softly at his feet. "Yes," I whispered.

"What?" he demanded, "I can't hear you, girl."

"YES!" I shouted as I met my tormentor's eyes. "I would take its place." The man before me was not dressed in the dragon dress of the Emperor. This was probably nothing more than one of his officers, ministers or judges. Some petty man playing god in this place.

"And defy my will?"

I turned my face to the floor again. "No, sir. That I would not do."

Now bored, that voice said, "Then make all as my will would be." I heard the *kuei-go* moan as it was dragged away. I whispered, so softly the guards could not hear it, "I'll come for you," but I did not know if he heard.



As the bureaucrat and his hangers-on left the courtyard, the guards unbound me and gave me clothing. I was allowed to keep all that I had brought out of the Maze, and bearing my precious burdens, I was escorted by two guardsmen to the exit to Hell. It took half the jade of one of the muzzles for them to do a small detour.

The *kuei-go* trainer readily exchanged two muzzles, which were each more valuable than any *kuei-go*, for the one useless Dog doomed to the mills. Perhaps he didn't know of this one's fate, or maybe he knew that any pelt would do. In any case, honestly bribed, he and my guards abandoned me and my new friend. Alone save for my *kuei-go*, I made for the exit to Hell, and the road back to my home village. What might my family say if they saw me again, and with a faithful hound at my side? What indeed.

Wondering at the opportunities and obstacles that might lay before me, our path soon led us past a small shrine to the Emperor and his Lords of Hell. I pondered defacing the monument and stepped inside. In it, though, was someone entirely unexpected. A cheerful old woman in traditional silk dress sat upon a bench, and next to her stood a young man in a

courier's outfit, with empty blackness where his eyes should have been.

"Child, sweet child," the motherly woman said with a smile like sunshine, "You look like you could use some good tea."

I was truly beguiled, dumbstruck at the genuine manner of the woman. She could hardly be some servant of the Empire. I stammered for words and shuffled my feet, not knowing whether to kneel in respect or flee in fear. My *kuei-go* companion was equally bewildered, his ears cocking, then flattening against his head.

She smiled then, a comforting smile just for me. Fear left, and was replaced by a sense of trust that was so out of place in this place of Mazes and Abysses. I bowed as best as I could and said very softly, "Yes, madam, I certainly could use a cup of tea. But madam?"

She cocked an eyebrow, inquisitive.

"May I bring my friend with me?"

"Of course, dear child, of course. Come. This way," she commanded as she rose, and as odd as it might sound, I gratefully followed.





# introduction

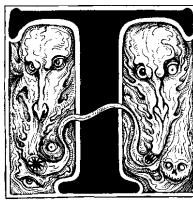
*It's about all sorts of scary things. About an ancient army of the Dead, the Spirit City, monkey sacrifices and the first sovereign emperor of China, that mad monarch who federated our seven warring states...*

— Wang Chi, *Big Trouble in Little China*

**T**oday there are 1.2 billion Chinese in the People's Republic of China alone, as well as tens of millions more in Taiwan, Hong Kong and beyond. One man has laid claim to all of their souls. For two millennia, he has exerted his will over the afterlives of everyone from Tibet to Japan and Mongolia to Vietnam. Born a bastard son of a merchant, he went on to conquer all of China. Upon his death, he repeated his feat in the world of the dead. Despite its ruler's humble origins, the Jade Kingdom is one of the most powerful kingdoms of the dead, and the most aggressively expansionist. The Emperor ensures peace at home through foreign conquest, and having absorbed much of the Far East, he now looks farther afield.

The Jade Kingdom encompasses the Shadowlands of China, Japan, Korea and much of Southeast Asia. It remains a realm largely unfamiliar to the Western Restless, a forbidding land that does not welcome outsiders. Rumors abound concerning the Emperor and his subjects. Some say the Kingdom is ruled through terror, a regime more authoritarian than any living state could be. Others say that the Emperor is an enlightened monarch whose subjects live in peace and security undreamed of under Stygian rule. The veracity of these rumors is indeterminable from the outside. Any true understanding of the Jade Kingdom must come from within. Only then can one see how the interplay of tradition, law and family has created a culture of the dead quite different from that in the West.

## What to Do With This Book



This is an overview of the realms of the dead of East Asia, specifically mainland China. It is a sourcebook on everything from fortune-telling to the streets of Hell, and what lies in between. Expanding on the *Zhongguo* section of the *Wraith Players' Guide*, *The Dark Kingdom of Jade* offers in-depth knowledge of the history of the lands of the Jade Emperor, as well as information on his government, his army and those who seek to end his rule.

While Japan, Korea, Tibet, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Kampuchea and the other lands of East Asia all have unique and complex notions of the afterlife, it is China around which they all revolve in the World of Darkness. Chinese customs, structures and laws of the dead have been imported into every inch of the Conquered Territories, and serve as the cultural paradigm for the entire Empire. To know the Empire, one must know the customs, enforced by the Jade Emperor, which are constant from Hokkaido to the Mekong Delta. As fascinating as the way in which the lore of *bushido* has been translated to the Underworld might be, it still only applies in the Shadowlands of Japan. The Emperor's law is law everywhere.



While there is no “best way” to use this book, it should give Storytellers ideas for campaigns in non-Stygian Shadowlands and players hints on creating non-Western characters. It is a window on a whole new afterlife, an entirely different way of looking at life and death from the one espoused in lands that owe fealty to Stygia. Feel free to use as much or as little of the material enclosed as you want. Include a Chinese wraith in a Stygian campaign, send an existing Circle on a mission to liberate a lost soul from Hell, hunt down “rebels and hungry ghosts” in the haunted mountains of Tibet — all of these are possibilities. The Jade Kingdom is a world to play in, just as Stygia is, and with **The Dark Kingdom of Jade**, you are welcomed inside its borders.

**Chapter One: The Chinese Dead** is an introduction to the philosophy of death in the Jade Kingdom, as well as a guide to the powers of jade and so-called “hungry ghosts.”

**Chapter Two: The History of the Jade Kingdom** is an overview of the history of the Jade Kingdom, from its prehistory to the devastation of Hiroshima and beyond.

**Chapter Three: The Government** paints a picture of how the Jade Kingdom is actually governed, with the Four Branches of Government and their unique powers outlined.

**Chapter Four: Life Among the Dead** provides information on wraith families, as well as the day-to-day existence of the Restless in the Far East.

**Chapter Five: Unreal Estate** paints a map of the Jade Kingdom and its Conquered Territories, from Japan to Bangkok and Tibet. Also included are major Chinese Necropoli and Haunts, as well as information of the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers in the lands of the dead.

**Chapter Six: A Guided Tour of Hell** takes you into Earth Prison, the Buddhist Hell created from the souls of the martyred. It details the path to Hell and the tortures to be found there, as well as offering some hope of escape....

**Chapter Seven: The Quick** covers how the living view, propitiate and strengthen the dead, as well as the ways in which unwanted ghosts can be dealt with, permanently.

**Chapter Eight: Systems and Stories** offers rules for new Arcanoi, martial arts and Merits and Flaws indigenous to the Jade Kingdom. Story ideas are presented as well, for Jade Kingdom or Stygian campaigns.

# Recommended Sources

There are of course a great many books and movies available on China in general, and the Storyteller is advised to familiarize herself with at least some of these. Any piece of genuinely Chinese culture (as opposed to force-feeding players fortune cookies or episodes of *Kung Fu: The Legend Continues*) that the Storyteller includes can only help to heighten the differences between Western culture and Chinese society. Traditional Asian music is readily available, as are paper lanterns which can be easily hung to over existing light sources to set the scene.

## Reading

*Insight Guide: China* (for a basic overview of the country), the *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tsu, Sima Qian's *The Historical Records*, *China Pop* by Zha Jian and Barry Hughart's delightful pair of fantasies *Bridge of Birds* and *Eight Skilled Gentlemen* are all basic sources. Also recommended are the collected Judge Dee mysteries, which date to the 15th century.

## Viewing

*Big Trouble in Little China*, *Iron and Silk* (also a book), *Farewell My Concubine*, *Jou Do*, *The Story of Qiu Jiu*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, *The Joy Luck Club* (from the novel by Amy Tan), *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*, *Ran*, *The Last Emperor*, *Throne of Blood*, *The Seven Samurai*, *Heaven and Earth*, *Coming Alive*, *The Silk Road* and *Red Sorghum*. Also recommended are the other films of Akira Kurosawa, as well as those of Toshiro Mifune. For the Storyteller looking to run a more modern campaign, the movies of John Woo and Jackie Chan are highly recommended.

## Listening

With the increasing popularity of world music, traditional Chinese and Japanese music can be found at most large record stores. Many compilations of traditional Asian music are published by labels like Shanachie, Rounder, Laser Light and Green Linnet. Of particular interest is the music of China's **Guo Brothers**, on Peter Gabriel's Real World label.

# Lexicon

**Buddhism:** A philosophy, founded in India, that teaches that right thinking and self-denial will enable the soul to reach Nirvana, a divine state of release from misdirected desire.

**Confucianism:** The ethical teachings formulated by Confucius and introduced into Chinese religion; they emphasize devotion to parents, family and friends, cultivation of the mind, self-control and honest social activity.

**Conquered Territories:** The non-Chinese Shadowlands under the dominion of the Jade Kingdom.

**Feng Shui:** "Chinese geomancy"; a magical method of determining how terrain and architecture affect the spirit world.

**Feng-Tu:** Entrance into the Hell created by the Emperor as a place to send criminals and enemies.

**Hun:** The intellectual aspect of the soul, controlling higher functions.

**Immortal Guard:** The Emperor's elite army; incredibly strong and fanatically loyal.

**Jade Palace:** The Emperor's colossal abode, located within the Tempest.

**Kuei:** "Hungry Ghosts"; nearly mindless manifestations of the disgruntled p'o that has not been properly buried. They wander the Yellow Springs, causing mayhem.

**Kuei-go:** The equivalent of barghests; wraiths that have been tortured and Moliated into mindless killing machines. Also known as "Bad Dogs."

**P'eng Lai:** Another term for Paradise.

**P'o:** The part of the soul related to physical aspects of existence; often referred to as the "animalistic" side of the soul.

**Qin Shihuang:** Yu Huang, Jade Emperor; in life, the first emperor of a united China.

**Taoism:** A philosophy founded on the doctrines of Lao Tsu; it advocates simplicity, selflessness and similar virtues.

**Ti Yu:** Earth Prison, the capital of Hell.

**White Jade:** The term for the milky white substance into which enslaved wraiths are often transformed; similar to Stygian soul-steel.

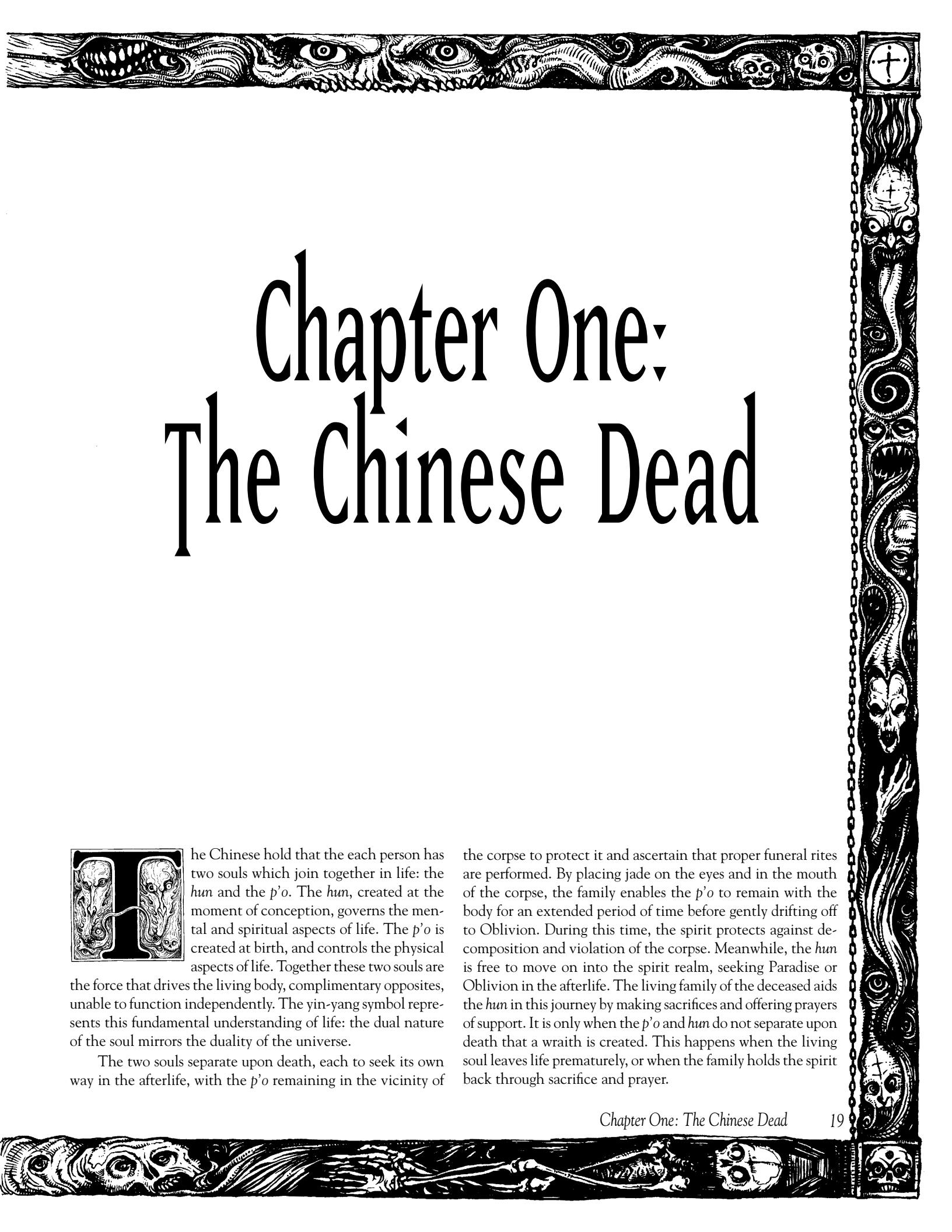
**Yellow Springs:** Another term for the Shadowlands.

**Yu:** The Chinese word for jade, which has mystical powers in the Underworld.

**Yu Huang:** The Jade Emperor; ruler of the lands of the Chinese dead and many Conquered Territories.

**Zhongguo:** The Middle Kingdom; China and the Skinlands thereof in general.





# Chapter One: The Chinese Dead

**T**he Chinese hold that each person has two souls which join together in life: the *hun* and the *p'o*. The *hun*, created at the moment of conception, governs the mental and spiritual aspects of life. The *p'o* is created at birth, and controls the physical aspects of life. Together these two souls are the force that drives the living body, complimentary opposites, unable to function independently. The yin-yang symbol represents this fundamental understanding of life: the dual nature of the soul mirrors the duality of the universe.

The two souls separate upon death, each to seek its own way in the afterlife, with the *p'o* remaining in the vicinity of

the corpse to protect it and ascertain that proper funeral rites are performed. By placing jade on the eyes and in the mouth of the corpse, the family enables the *p'o* to remain with the body for an extended period of time before gently drifting off to Oblivion. During this time, the spirit protects against decomposition and violation of the corpse. Meanwhile, the *hun* is free to move on into the spirit realm, seeking Paradise or Oblivion in the afterlife. The living family of the deceased aids the *hun* in this journey by making sacrifices and offering prayers of support. It is only when the *p'o* and *hun* do not separate upon death that a wraith is created. This happens when the living soul leaves life prematurely, or when the family holds the spirit back through sacrifice and prayer.



When the *hun* and *p'o* do not separate, the *hun* takes the part of the Psyche while the *p'o* becomes the equivalent of the Shadow. The *p'o* functions in the same way a Shadow would, ultimately self-centered and egoistic. It also resents being tied to the *hun*, and will attempt to bring about the separation the only way it knows how: by destroying the wraith. A wraith's *p'o* should be played in the same way as a Stygian wraith's Shadow, and the same rules, archetypes and conventions apply. There is no fundamental difference between a Shadow and a *p'o* for a Shadowplayer.

After death, the spirit proceeds along one of three paths: Paradise, Oblivion or the afterlife. Centuries of speculation have produced no sure understanding of the paradigm that determines an individual's destination. The first two of these paths are not fully understood, the third is the Jade Kingdom. Paradise, or the Isles of P'eng Lai, is the ultimate goal of any soul, for here one may find eternal peace and fulfillment. Few souls succeed in reaching P'eng Lai, and only a handful have returned to show others the way. Holy men and wise teachers are thought to journey directly to the Isles upon their death. Most others must seek entrance via the Jade Kingdom.

Oblivion is by far the most common destination for the dead. Here, Oblivion is viewed as a natural part of existence, like life or Paradise, and wise teachers urge that one should not fear its coming. Oblivion is both the source and the end of every soul, and is thus within every being. Philosophers often laugh when they learn of the Stygian fear of the Void, for they claim that when a soul enters Oblivion it is soon to be reborn within the world of the living. It is a journey to be cherished, for it offers another chance at life, another opportunity to seek Paradise. It must be noted, however, that despite these wise teachings, many in the Jade Kingdom fear Oblivion. The idea of starting over is not always appealing, especially to those who have attained some degree of power or wealth.

A variety of souls find themselves within the Jade Kingdom upon dying, as it is often the family who determines, inadvertently, whom shall remain. The Chinese hold great respect for their dead, and continue to honor them for years after the funeral rites. This investiture of Pathos is often strong enough to keep the soul tied to the living world, and forms a sort of partnership between the living family and the deceased one. The living relatives offer sacrifices and support to the dead in their pursuit of happiness in the afterlife, while the departed in

turn offer the living whatever supernatural aid they can. This strong familial relationship is the foundation of the Jade Kingdom's society, with wraiths organizing themselves into families in order to recreate in death that structure they found in life.

Since a relatively small number of dead become wraiths, wraith families often pull together distant relatives. The families are run by the oldest wraiths, regardless of gender, who decide the entire family's course. Prayers and supplications from the living are decided upon by the family's elders, while the head also serves as the liaison between the family and Imperial Officials. Some of the larger families are spread out over different regions of the Kingdom, but even these far-flung groups gather at festival times and on other occasions to make policy.

When a person dies and the *hun* and *p'o* separate, it is possible that the *p'o* will become a *kuei*, or hungry ghost. Usually the *p'o* remains with the body, protecting it from interference by other spirits or others who would meddle with the body's rest. However, if the body does not receive the proper rites and honors, the *p'o* becomes vengeful. The *kuei* are savage spirits with only the most basic motivations. The hungry ghosts can cause great trouble in the lands of the dead, but have certain limitations. They may not come out in the sunlight, or they are destroyed. Likewise, they seldom exist for longer than about three years, after which time their spirit is fully consumed by Oblivion. The Quick have various charms to protect against these malevolent spirits, not all of which work.

The realities of the afterlife are an amalgam of traditional views and the personal vision of the Jade Emperor. Much of the societal structure of the Jade Kingdom was born directly from the Emperor's mind, but he modeled his vision upon the expectations of his subjects. By twisting the beliefs of his people, the Emperor assures their complicity. There is a natural expectation that the afterlife will be very structured and autocratic, even more so than the living China. The expectation of a Hell where souls are tortured for their crimes helped the Emperor to create just such a place. But, instead of being judged according to how they lived, the Emperor sends individuals to Hell according to his laws and whims. Over the centuries, the Jade Kingdom has become a dark parody of Chinese beliefs and customs, resembling them in form but not necessarily in function.

The Jade Emperor has ruled for over a thousand years; during that time the realm has seen significant changes. As time progressed, the Emperor took less personal interest in the daily efforts of ruling such a vast territory. Although from the beginning the Empire employed a Bureaucracy, governmental institutions have grown dramatically in size and complexity over recent centuries. Now it seems that the Bureaucracy extends into every corner of the realm, affecting the existence of every wraith in a hundred different ways every day. Rules and

regulations govern every type of behavior, from the gathering of souls to aiding one's own family. Fortunately, the government is as corrupt as it is authoritarian. Officials are susceptible to bribes, and legal disputes are often decided by bribes rather than law. Despite this venality, the Emperor still commands great fear and respect. Most are grateful for the relative stability he provides, and everyone fears his wrath. No one has not seen or heard of the Emperor's tremendous capacity for cruelty in meting out his justice.

The Emperor's rule is not restricted to the Chinese Underworld. Through military conquest Qin Shihuang has expanded his domain to include much of East Asia's Underworld. While in the Shadowlands of China existence is relatively peaceful, the Conquered Territories are a nightmare where non-Chinese souls are enslaved *en masse*. Just as in Stygia, the economy of the Jade Kingdom is fueled by the harvesting of souls. Long ago the Emperor found that he could maintain domestic peace by assuring that Chinese souls would be free from the fear of harvesting. To compensate for this loss of resources, the Emperor turned abroad. The Conquered Territories are armed camps, dominated by the Imperial Collection Centers into which Reapers herd new souls. The native peoples struggle to uphold their own traditions in the face of violent oppression. Rebellion constantly threatens Imperial Rule, and the army is continually putting down violent uprisings. Without the souls of foreigners, the complex society of the Jade Kingdom would collapse, cannibalizing itself in rebellions and internal strife. Dissident groups cling to an ancient prophecy that holds that the Emperor shall fall with the fifth challenge to his reign. By some accounts the moment is at hand, although official Imperial Histories maintain that there has never been any challenge to His Imperial Augustness, Qin Shihuang.

## Themes

**W**ithin the complex web of laws and familial relations, each wraith seeks its place in the Jade Kingdom. The Emperor dominates the scene, his power penetrating every level of society. Although all feel his presence, few are blindly loyal. The family remains the central institution in the existence of most wraiths, determining the path of the individual for the greatest benefit to the clan. Some chafe under this system and try to break free, seeking their own path to enlightenment, while others are content within the Emperor's security and the arms of tradition.

Those in the Conquered Territories see the Jade Kingdom in a different light. While Chinese families have the freedom



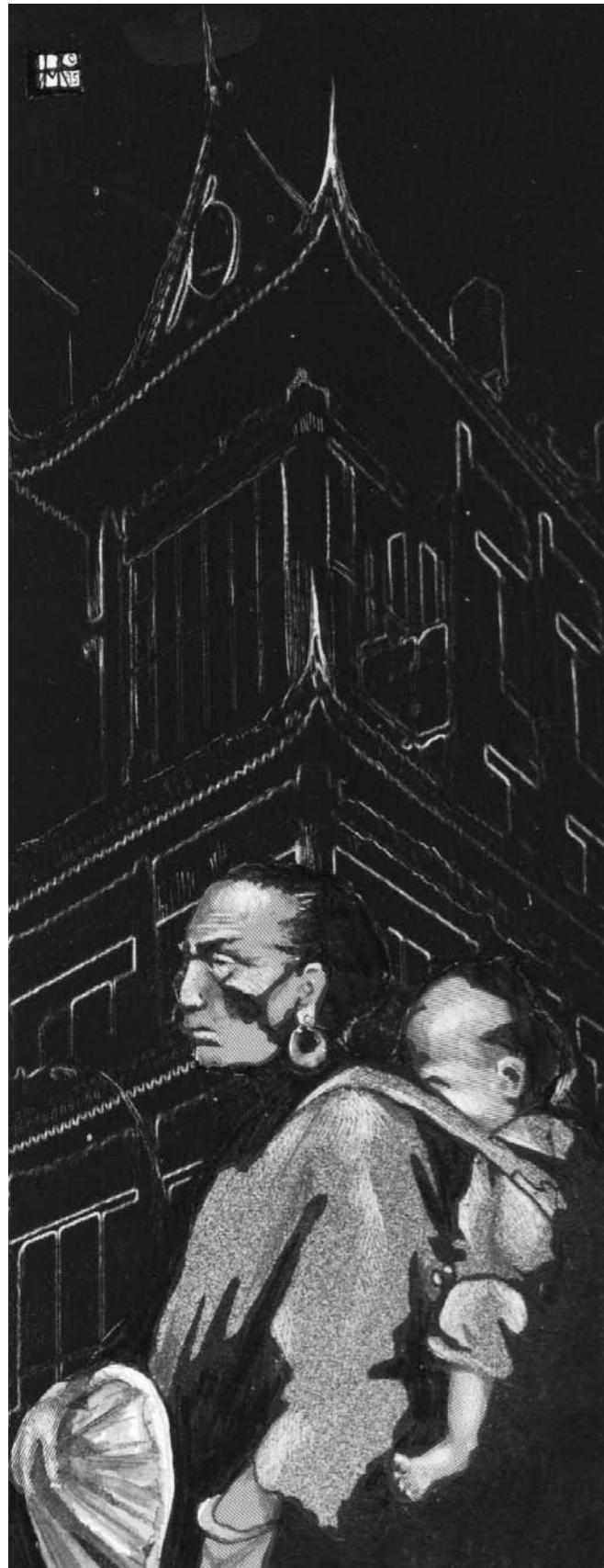
to work toward for their own goals, the subject peoples struggle to survive. The oppressive rule of the Emperor makes their afterlife a constantly terrifying experience. Each must choose either total submission or armed revolt.

Chinese culture is steeped in traditional rites and customs. The classical Confucian hierarchical relationships still prevail in the Jade Kingdom, and obligation and honor play a part in every aspect of life. In every action a wraith must consider how it will affect the whole of her world. Is it acceptable to the family? Does it conform to the Emperor's law? Will the wraith lose or gain face? The slightest offense can mean terrible consequences. Those who do not follow traditional ways risk damnation, suffering enslavement and bringing shame on their family. But the traditions bestow great benefits as well. In this Confucian system, a wraith always know where she stands. She need never face the realities of death alone as long as the family is there. As the status of the family improves, so does that of every member. In a dark and dangerous world, tradition brings hope of order and safety.

Authority is an equally important theme in the Jade Kingdom. The authority of the Jade Emperor is unquestionable. He is the source of all power in the Kingdom, and families compete against each other to win this favor. Only by honoring the Emperor and following his laws is it possible to advance in society. Those who oppose him invariably fall. His power, exercised through the myriad government officials who enforce his law, and with whom every family must deal with to achieve these goals, is often oppressive or even brutal. However, it also provides structure and context for his subjects. The authoritarian regime offers an acceptable blueprint for the advancement of families, channeling their ambition within the system rather than against the Emperor. The authority of the Emperor ensures stability for the Chinese dead, stability that wouldn't exist without the resources provided by the Conquered Territories.

Hand in hand with the theme of authority is that of oppression. Whereas citizens of the Jade Kingdom live in peace under the Emperor's authority, denizens of the Conquered Territories are the victims of constant savagery and violence. There are no laws or protection for the wraiths of Japan, Korea, Tibet or Nepal. The collection of souls for the Emperor's coffers results in draconian oppression. Although only a portion of each nation's dead are collected, all fear and hate the Imperial Reapers. Existence under such conditions is horrific, giving rise to constant struggle against the oppressors. In these lands there is no stability or reassurance under Imperial Law. The Emperor's troops crush every spark of hope that flares, however briefly.

Far from the terror of the Conquered Territories, many of the Chinese dead continue to search for enlightenment. The living Buddha and others have shown a way to Paradise, and follow that path, even in death. For many, the afterlife is a chance to succeed in the quest at which they failed in life. The





path to P'eng Lai is a personal journey. Buddhist and Taoists sects exist in the Jade Kingdom, but they can only point the way. Each must find it on her own. Achieving Transcendence offers freedom from the concerns and obligations of life in the Jade Kingdom. However, abandoning those responsibilities to see P'eng Lai can bring repercussions from one's family or even the Empire.

Familial interests and the authority of the Emperor do not always coincide. Each wraith must choose between law and family. Likewise, many find the wholesale slavery of the Conquered Territories to be abhorrent, but know that society would collapse without it. Each individual and family is forced to choose between their own comfort or that of others. If one succeeds in finding the way to P'eng Lai or succumbs to Oblivion, the family is weakened by the loss. Here again the choice is a difficult one: between the potential for salvation or rebirth and the retribution of the law.

# Jade

**J**hought to be crystallized moonlight, jade comes from China's holiest mountains. There are actually several different stones of many hues that are called jade, but clear emerald green is the most highly valued. For millennia, artisans have carved the hard stone, valued more than gold or silver, into important religious and ceremonial symbols for the ancient kings and emperors of China. Several kings even had pieces of jade strung together to form garments to wear over their robes.

Beyond these possible mundane uses, jade is most coveted for its powers as an aid to the newly dead. Jade was the highest sacrifice that could be made to the departed souls of the dead, for it could ensure the safety of each of the parts of the soul. In burial, jade pieces covered the eyes and tongue of the corpse in order to prevent decomposition. Jade has the power to bind the *p'o* to the body of the deceased, thus ensuring that the body is protected in burial, as well as preventing the *p'o* from becoming a *kuei*, who might then terrorize the community. Additionally, the dead were often given *bi* (jade disks representing heaven) to help them in the afterlife. Kings are known to have been buried with their jade robes, thus ensuring even greater protection for their souls.

A person buried with jade is more likely to become a wraith, particularly if a great deal of jade is present. The mystical stone prevents the two parts of the soul from separating, thus creating a wraith. This can be most disconcerting, especially if the newly-born wraith had led a peaceful life, and would normally have proceeded on to some paradise or new incarnation. In the same vein, those who regularly partake

of immortality elixirs made from jade are also more likely to become wraiths, as the particles develop a psychic residue in the body, holding the *hun* and *p'o* together. Even if the *hun* does manage to escape, even a small amount of jade on the corpse will hold the *p'o* in the body and prevent the creation of a hungry ghost.

All jade that is buried with a body will come into the Yellow Springs with the owner in relic form. This is known as True Jade, and is the most highly valued substance in the Kingdom, even more so than souls. A skilled artisan can shape True Jade into incredibly strong *objets d'arte* which will never fade from existence and which can be easily passed from one wraith to another. Even more significant are True Jade's arcane abilities. Jade items may be crafted to store Pathos, which may later be drawn upon by anyone possessing the item. Jade weapons are highly prized because of their devastating effect on the Corpus, causing aggravated wounds. Furthermore, any blade of True Jade can cut through the substance White Jade on a Strength + Melee roll at a difficulty of 4. White Jade can only hew True Jade on the same roll at a difficulty of 8, and any botch means that the White Jade blade has broken irreparably. When White and True Jade blades cross in combat, the former almost invariably end up shattered.

## Useful Souls



ouls are the raw resource on which the Jade Empire is founded. Most souls condemned to an afterlife as raw materials are smelted down into White Jade, a substance similar but inferior to True Jade. There are other uses for souls that the Imperial Government has found. These are generally of two types: Eunuchs and *kuei*. While hungry ghosts are not deliberately created by the Empire, ones that are captured and tamed are useful tools in the Emperor's hand.

### Eunuchs

In life, the Emperor had used castration as a punishment, as well as employing eunuchs at court. Continuing a tradition that went back many centuries, Qin Shihuang employed eunuchs as wardens of his concubines as well as ministers at court. Because they could have no family, their fate was tied to that of their ruler, and they were more likely to serve him loyally. The threat of such a punishment was useless in the afterlife, and the Emperor had to go without these faithful servants until one of his ministers in the Protectorate, Zhang Kunyi, developed a new method of providing useful, totally obedient slaves, now known throughout the kingdom as Eunuchs.



Eunuchs of the Jade Kingdom do not function as custodians or ministers, nor would they be able to do so. A Eunuch is a soul that has been totally drained of any will or ability besides that which helps in the storage and relation of information. Paper and other writing materials are at a premium in the Jade Kingdom, and the material can be used for more important endeavors than storing large amounts of information. However, the vast Imperial Bureaucracy needs to keep extensive records for everything from taxation to military orders and laws, and so the information is stored in Eunuchs instead.

Creating a Eunuch involves two Arcanoi: Moliate and Way of the Scholar (See **Chapter 8: Systems and Stories**). First the subject's mind is totally subjugated through by a skilled Scholar, who wipes clean any memories of the past and eventually removes the ability to think at all. This ensures a clean slate onto which information can be recorded. The Corpus of the subject is then Moliated according to the purpose for which it is being designed. This typically involves opening up the chest and abdomen and creating a series of levers and switches that can be used to access the appropriate information. The arms are usually removed completely, as that portion of the Corpus is seldom of any further use. The legs are left intact, as it is often useful to have a mobile Eunuch, as is the mouth, so

that it can easily relay information. A collar of White Jade is then placed around its neck, and the owner is left with a fully functional Eunuch.

On command, a Eunuch remembers whatever it is told by its master, usually the presiding magistrate. By touching the appropriate lever, the magistrate can retrieve the information at any time and have it repeated back verbatim. Eunuchs are incapable of original thought or independent action, and can only act as they are ordered. Some Eunuchs are assigned to a particular magistrate, and often have a lock which must be opened with a key made from the Eunuch's Corpus. Others are public sources of information, placed in central locations within Necropoli. These Eunuchs commonly contain records of Imperial Decrees and local news. It is a terrible offense to tamper with an Imperial Eunuch, and the punishment for this crime is to take the damaged Eunuch's place.

Each of the Four Branches of the Imperial Government has its own style of Eunuch, suited to their individual needs. The Jade Censors use a specialized sort of Eunuch called an Abacus, as they are used to keep track of the taxes on relics as well as the rosters of citizenship. The Judges of the Dead employ Eunuchs as repositories of the law codes, while the Imperial Army employs them as messengers because they can be relied upon to deliver



orders verbatim. Protectors generally use Eunuchs to record information about those they investigate, as well as to capture and store the confessions of those whom they catch.

## Kuei

Chinese tradition tells many tales of *kuei*, or hungry ghosts. These are malicious souls, the products of improper burials or the failure of the living to properly honor the dead. The living are well aware of these restless spirits, and have traditionally held an annual festival designed to placate them. These hungry ghosts differ from departed ancestors who become wraiths; rather they are the ghostly manifestation of the *p'o* alone. While a wraith retains most of her memories of life and continues to operate under free will, *kuei* are nearly mindless spirits, full of anger and malevolence at the living world.

*Kuei* are not nearly as powerful or durable as wraiths. The merest touch of sunlight will completely destroy them. They do not possess any of the more advanced Arcanoi, though they do have some power. *Kuei* seldom last longer than three years, after which they simply fade into Oblivion. During their lives, however, they often stay in the vicinity of their corpse, which acts as their only Fetter to the living world. They may remember snippets of their past, but as the *hun* has moved on, only base instincts and motivations remain. They feel a need for vengeance upon those who have wronged them, but cannot think clearly enough to recognize who the object of their hatred should be. Likewise, they ache for a peaceful rest, but have no knowledge of how to escape their hellish existence. Confused and hurting, these hungry ghosts lash out at everyone except other *kuei*. Often hungry ghosts form hunting packs, roving the Yellow Springs and attacking any who cross their path.

The souls of the *kuei* are of weak stuff, and cannot be used by Artisans to create quality White Jade. Anything made from *kuei* Corpus will fall to pieces within months. *Kuei* do develop Arcanoi, but never above the first level. However, they often manifest abilities similar to those used by Spectres; claws and fangs that do aggravated damage are particularly common (See **Wraith: The Oblivion and Dark Reflections: Spectres** for more ideas as to the sorts of powers *kuei* can manifest).

There are important differences between *kuei* and Spectres, the most important of which is that hungry ghosts are found almost exclusively in the Shadowlands. They do have one Fetter, their body, and this allows them to roam freely in its vicinity. If the body is moved, the *kuei* will move with it; if the body is destroyed, the *kuei* is destroyed as well. *Kuei* may also can gather Pathos from the living, but are limited to Passions of fear, hatred and despair. In their tortured state, they cannot comprehend any other kinds of emotion.



Marauding bands of hungry ghosts are a constant threat that the Militia is required to deal with. The local Military magistrate is required to respond immediately to any report of *kuei* within the region he controls. A moderate application of force is normally enough to put down even a large group of *kuei*, but individuals and small groups often slip past Imperial Troops and into areas where they can wreak havoc. Large Necropoli often have significant *kuei* problems, especially in the poorer regions of the city where proper burials are less common. As the traditional burial practices have lapsed, the number of hungry ghosts has increased so dramatically that most cities now have permanent patrols to hunt them down. Many Necropoli establish great holding pens in which they store captured *kuei*. In some cases the *kuei* can be trained to follow simple orders and are used by the Militia like hounds. This can be dangerous, and often backfires on the incautious trainer. *Kuei* are also made to fight each other for the pleasure of the citizens, and there is often heavy betting on such occasions. Some *kuei* even gain renown as great fighters and develop loyal fans, but ultimately, they are still enslaved beasts, yearning only to rip into the nearest Corpus.

It is the living who have the most power to stop a ravaging *kuei*. The easiest way to do this is to give the corpse of a *kuei* a formal burial with proper funeral rites. *Kuei* often return to their corpses to rest and hide from pursuers, and at this time humans can trap the *kuei* within its own body. Placing jade over the eyes and tongue of the corpse imprisons the *p'o* in the body until either the jade is removed or three years have passed, and the *kuei* fades into Oblivion.

It is also possible for the living to destroy a *kuei* outright with bodily fluids. Hungry ghosts suffer tremendous damage when exposed to blood or saliva, and even the smallest amount will cause them to recoil in fear. These liquids will cause aggravated damage to *kuei*, and will cause the hungry ghost to shrink to half its original size. Being hit a total of three times with blood or saliva will destroy the *kuei* completely. However, the *kuei* have the advantage of being invisible to humans, and can thus avoid this fate.

### Sample Kuei Statistics:

**Physical:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5,

**Social:** Charisma 0, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 3 Brawl 4 Intimidation 3 Stealth 3

**Arcanoi:** Argos 1, Embody 1, Pandemonium 1, Outrage 1, Moliate 1

**Passions:** Five points in connection to their former home or their grave.

**Willpower:** 3

**Pathos:** 4



# Chapter Two: The History of the Jade Kingdom

Stand before it and there is no beginning.  
Follow it and there is no end.  
Stay with the ancient Tao,  
Move with the present.  
Knowing the ancient beginning is the essence of the Tao.  
—Lao Tsu, Tao Te Ching

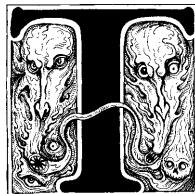
Dear Jacob:

The following account has been derived from several sources: Imperial records, Stygian battle diaries, confessions extracted from political prisoners and the occasional kidnapped Eunuch. It does not claim to be comprehensive, or even completely accurate. It paints a picture of a disturbingly overweening and far removed from the "yellow devil" propaganda of a certain and potent that lords would wish to "foster on the population. Instead, certain of our Empire, vibrant, diverse culture with some weaknesses, Jade our Death, for all intents and purposes no longer appears to be human. No, no, no, read first and then start speculating.

I trust that you will see that this falls into the right hands, including those of our contacts in the Citadel. If war is coming, and I believe it is, then we need accurate information the Jade Kingdom is more than a thousand souls - forged artillery pieces. Luck go with you, my friend.

Yours,  
Edward G.  
For the commanders of His Majesty's Icestream Guard

# Introduction



The prehistory of the Jade Kingdom is shrouded in mystery, as the Jade Emperor strongly discourages any delving into the past. Most wraiths in the Kingdom today do not even realize that there was a time before the Emperor.

From ancient times, society was centered around the family unit. The elaborate system of ancestor worship developed early in Chinese history, with the honoring of deceased rulers. Powerful individuals began to be buried with extensive grave goods as a sign of their importance, and these ritual offerings to the dead eventually filtered down to all levels of society. The benefits of this practice were soon communicated back to the living. When the Quick contacted the dead through divination rituals, wraiths rapidly informed them that the tradition was one that the ancestors smiled upon.

## Before Qin Shihuang



As monarchical institutions arose in China, the rituals of burial became more complex. Chinese mystics explored the nature of the soul, considering both the living and the dead. Dying rulers wished to affirm their glory through elaborate and expensive grave gifts. Ancient tradition held that of-

ferings of jade were especially potent, because of its association with the soul. The tradition of ancestor worship also developed out of the elaborate death rites of the Chinese kings. The living paid homage to the spirits of dead kings long after their deaths, to aid them in the afterlife and gain their support in the living world. Eventually ancestors as well as kings became the recipients of this sort of worship, and the tradition expanded.

Until the third century BC, China had never been united under one rule. The three early dynasties never controlled the whole of China, either in the Skinlands or the Shadowlands. The only order in the lands of the dead was that provided by loose-knit clans of wraiths, and even these were chaotic by modern standards. They were more alliances for self-protection against Spectres and *kuei* than true political entities.

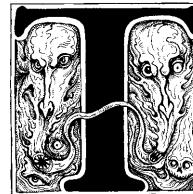
The growing refinement of burial rituals and ancestor worship meant that wealthy individuals entered the Shadowlands as powerful wraiths. They had potent relics at their disposal as well as the empathic support of living worshippers, and such wraiths were able to carve out small kingdoms for

themselves. They organized the families, and set up simple systems for reaping souls. As the kingdoms grew, they began to conflict with one another. Old rulers were constantly on the lookout for the death of a living potentate. Such an event always held the potential for tremendous disruption. The newly interred soul would enter death expecting to be worshipped and honored. More often than not he found a throng of hostile wraiths ready to harvest his soul and steal his relics. Those who survived often began rebellions, hoping to wrest power for themselves.

This chaotic scene was thrown into further turmoil by marauding bands of *kuei*. In times of war in the living realm, many hungry ghosts would be created, and it was unsafe to journey anywhere unless in large groups. At times local rulers would launch campaigns against the *kuei*, but it was impossible to establish any lasting stability. The family was the only institution that offered any security. Few felt any loyalty to the warlords and petty kings who established themselves for brief moments. Clans, growing stronger with each new death, preferred to form their own alliances to provide for defense and the needs of the family.

The mysteries of the Tempest remained relatively unexplored. The hungry ghosts were a commonplace problem that could be dealt with, but periodic incursions by Spectres were much more dangerous. What these beings were or why they came was unknown. At times of great discord in the living world, the Spectres would burst forth into the Shadowlands, assuming a variety of horrific forms and bent on destruction. Unlike the *kuei*, these were powerful foes, guided by a malevolent intelligence. On several occasions, Spectres were known to destroy entire wraith kingdoms, leaving a power vacuum which resulted in further disorder as neighboring warlords fought for the control of the region's souls.

## The First Emperor



The Kingdom of Qin was one of the most prominent of the living kingdoms in the third century BC. The Qin made significant advances in organizing their state and mobilizing its resources, and it was a Qin king who first managed to unite most of China under one rule. Throughout the 330s and 320s, the Qin expanded their power until, by 221 BC, the king was able to claim for himself the title Qin Shihuangdi, or First Emperor. Qin Shihuang proceeded to organize the new Chinese state through the use of an extensive bureaucracy. The First Emperor was also renowned for his cruelty and tyrannical oppression. He is famous for having burned thousands of books because he disagreed with their philosophies, as well as



having a large group of scholars buried alive. Towards the end of his reign, Qin Shihuang became obsessed with finding the secrets of immortality, and surrounded himself with mystics and magicians in a vain attempt to avoid death.

When Qin Shihuang saw that his quest for immortality would prove fruitless, he turned on his court magicians in a rage. They had assured him that the secret of immortal life could be found if enough effort was put forth. But their efforts had produced nothing until a group of men arrived at court claiming to be followers of an ancient magical tradition known as the Ways of the Spirits. These mysterious wizards were rumored to possess great powers in this world as well as in the land of the dead. They wandered the Middle Kingdom searching for knowledge and practicing their magical arts.

The First Emperor's hopes rose, thinking that perhaps these wizards could succeed where all others had failed. Their leader, Fu Xia, said that the death of the Emperor was only a few years off, and that after his death, his empire would crumble. Qin Shihuang rose in anger, but the mage offered him an alternative: eternal greatness in the afterlife. The world of the dead was much like the living China before Qin Shihuang united it, a collection of petty kings and robber barons, easy pickings for a superior foe. In death, the First Emperor's rule

would never have to end, and he could rule with the authority of a god on earth.

The Followers of the Ways of the Spirits claimed to have extensive knowledge of the ways of the underworld, obtained through discourse with the dead. They offered to teach these secrets to the First Emperor, but warned that the price of immortal power was even higher than that of temporal supremacy. Ruling the dead would be very different from lording over living Chinese, and success could only be achieved through the aid of the Followers of the Ways of the Spirits. Of course, Fu Xia and his fellows were willing to help the great Emperor in any way they could, and in return would expect only remuneration appropriate to their efforts. Should he refuse their reasonable offer, the Emperor was free to face the dangers of the afterlife on his own.

Qin Shihuang was naturally shocked by these revelations. He dismissed the mages without a word and retired to his chambers. Late that night the Emperor called Fu Xia to his chambers for private discourse. Exactly what followed is uncertain. The two are said to have talked through the dawn, undisturbed by any servant or courtier. One tradition holds that the mage actually took the Emperor into the land of the dead, another that he called up the ghosts of Qin Shihuang's



ancestors who persuaded the Emperor to heed Fu Xia. What is certain is that Fu Xia took up residence in the palace and began preparing the Emperor for his death.

Under the wizard's tutelage, the Emperor laid out explicit instructions as to how he was to be buried and what types of honors and rituals were to be bestowed upon him. Construction began upon the First Emperor's tomb, a huge complex modeled upon the Emperor's Palace. Sculptors came from throughout China to decorate the Necropolis and for another purpose.

Twenty-four thousand of the Emperor's finest soldiers assembled in secret near the Palace at Xi'an. Artisans created life-sized terra cotta statues of each of them, made according to Fu Xia's exacting specifications. When finished, each statue was painted and equipped with real weapons, and each soldier smeared some of his own blood upon his double's lips. Uncertain as to the purpose of all this, the soldiers were then called to a banquet in honor of their service to the Emperor.

The banquet was far more than an exotic meal. Even as he fed their bodies, Fu Xia stole the soldiers' lives and souls, and imbued in them an undying love for their Emperor. Peacefully, resigned to their duties, the soldiers died to a man. Not one of these men became a wraith, however. Their souls had gone into the Shadowlands, but bound to their respective statues. The soldiers' spirits remained dormant within their prisons, waiting for the word of the First Emperor to wake them.

Fu Xia had the statues buried in the fields surrounding the still-uncompleted tomb. This was done quickly, using thousands of workers who were then killed to ensure that they never revealed the army's whereabouts. As Qin Shihuang's health declined, he spent more and more time in private conference with Fu Xia. Even the Emperor's most trusted advisors were barred from these meetings, where the two plotted against the time when the Emperor would enter the Realm of the Dead. Qin Shihuang learned a great deal of the workings of the Underworld. Soon he longed for death, excited by the new power he would wield. As soon as the myriad preparations were completed, he gladly died.

The Second Emperor buried his father with great pomp and ceremony, under the direction of Fu Xia. Along with the Emperor went his favorite courtesans and servants, all killed to serve the Emperor in the afterlife. The tomb was sealed and covered with earth and foliage, disguising it. Even as Fu Xia performed the final rites to ensure the Emperor's safe rest, the Second Emperor turned his attention to ruling his quickly disintegrating kingdom. To his great relief, the mysterious Fu Xia and his companions vanished that night.

# Qin Shihuang Begins His Eternal Reign

Qin Shihuang's soul left his body deep within his tomb. Oil lamps lit the inner chamber, revealing the relics of the First Emperor's living reign. He took up the sword that Fu Xia had placed there, and strode into the throne room. There were huddled the ghosts of his servants and courtesans. He cut their Cauls, and ordered them to prepare him for an address to the troops. The entire Necropolis was a kind of relic, prepared by Fu Xia's rituals and brought into the Shadowlands by magical force. Within it were the tools and symbols of Imperial Rule. Properly outfitted, the Emperor proceeded along underground passages to the chambers containing his sleeping army.

The presence of the Emperor stirred the soldiers. As they became cognizant of their surroundings, they realized that their souls were bound to their terra-cotta forms. Qin Shihuang commanded them to rise and prepare for battle. On the surface, a few wraiths had gathered in anticipation of sacking the relics and souls within the Necropolis. They were startled to see the Emperor and his court appear upon the crest of the burial mound, their Cauls already removed. Still sensing easy prey, the wraiths advanced upon the mound. The Emperor raised his arms, and suddenly the field erupted with thousands of ghostly lights.

The terra-cotta army rose from its resting place, glowing brightly in colors that defied the deathly pallor of the underworld. The shrieks of the dead were drowned by the stomp of booted clay feet as those who had sought to victimize Qin Shihuang were rounded up by the glowing forms. Brought before the Emperor, they were offered the unexpected: mercy. This handful of wraiths became the first citizens of the Jade Empire.

With his first victory secured, Qin Shihuang marshaled his forces and prepared to march on the nearest of the neighboring kings. Only 18,000 of his troops had risen at his command, and the failure of the other 6000 to manifest both terrified and enraged him. Fearing betrayal by Fu Xia, he determined to make use of what troops he had, and set off to conquer the lands of the dead.

The Emperor's first target was the warlord who had sent troops to harvest his soul. He dispatched one of his new citizens as a messenger to the warlord. Disbelieving, the warlord had not even marshaled his troops when Qin Shihuang's army, 18,000 strong, appeared. Such a force dwarfed anything the Shadowlands had ever seen. Occasionally warlords had put together armies that numbered in the thousands, but such cases were rare. It was nearly impossible to gather such a large number of the dead and keep them together. The warlord's small force surrendered without a struggle, going over to the Emperor to a man. Qin Shihuang himself destroyed the warlord as punishment for not surrendering immediately.

Qin Shihuang marched on, quickly capturing much of the surrounding territory. He then paused to consolidate and let word of his triumphs spread. Many local warlords sent messengers offering peace, and though he heard them all, he responded to none. He would not have peace until he had personally overthrown every possible source of opposition. He wanted to be seen throughout the Middle Kingdom so that all would know the vastness of his power.

As his army marched on, Qin Shihuang laid down the foundations of his government. He groomed certain of his new citizens for magisterial positions. He chose primarily those who had chafed under the rule of the warlords whom he had overthrown. He also began to build a force of soldiers drawn from the local wraith population, not wishing to be entirely dependent upon the creations of Fu Xia. He was relatively certain that they were loyal to him, but he did not fully trust the mage. Moving cautiously, he used the wraith troops to garrison his conquered territory, and left them under the command of a few of his Immortal Guard.

From all across China wraiths flocked to the Emperor. It was obvious to most that he was unstoppable. But many whom he'd slain feared or hated him enough to resist. Many of these were scholars whom Qin Shihuang had killed in order to suppress their teachings. Nevertheless, the Immortal Guard swept aside all resistance. Nearly invulnerable in battle, they used that weapons could seemingly dispatch a wraith to Oblivion with but a touch. They also displayed a formidable new Arcanos which immobilized foes for the *coup de grace*.

Needing both subjects and souls to build his kingdom, Qin Shihuang took surrenders whenever he could. He also drafted the dead of the many rebellions now spilling across the living China. The Emperor appointed ministers to oversee the harvesting of these new souls, different men from those appointed to govern conquered territory. Qin Shihuang wanted to assure that no single individual gathered the power to challenge his authority. At this point the Emperor himself still took a very active hand in every aspect of ruling his kingdom. His ministers were chosen for loyalty and the ability to carry out his orders to the letter, not personal initiative. Fu Xia had helped develop a complex strategy for empire building, and the Emperor did not want to deviate from it at all.

The strategy worked well from the beginning. It took less than a year for the Emperor to establish himself as sole sovereign over the Chinese dead, facing only one real challenge along the way. The final battle with the resistance, who had massed their troops in the shadow of the Great Wall Qin Shihuang himself had commissioned, was nearly a disaster. The opposing leader, Li K'un, in the hope that Qin Shihuang's tyranny could be forestalled permanently, had contacted a powerful Malfean, Lung Wang, and made a deal. In exchange for the souls of Li K'un and all his followers, Lung Wang would destroy the Emperor's Immortal Guard.



## From the Imperial Records, Eunuch # 237-987-44

Being a record of the events surrounding His Most Divine Augustness' first encounter with the demon Lung Wang and his preordained triumph. Recorded by the honorable Jae Quon, late an ambassador to the great Court of the Middle Kingdom.

...many of the Emperor's loyal subjects had fallen beneath the hordes of demons, though the Immortal Guard stood firm. A great host of demons lay beneath their swords, and at their head stood the Emperor, may he reign eternally. Then came among them the demon called Lung Wang, which took to itself the form of a great white dragon. He struck the Guard, and even they could not stand before its hellish power. The Emperor, great in his wisdom, left the field of battle to retrieve the Ju-i, that sign that he had the favor of the gods. Those who doubted the Imperial Divine Providence saw this and were afraid, for they did not believe, and thought that Yu Huang had abandoned us. These doubters threw down their arms, and were set upon by demons, and were sent forthwith to the Hell of Being Torn to Pieces. But those who believed stood fast, even though the demon dragon slew all who faced it. Then the Emperor returned, and in his hand was a thunderbolt of green jade. Lung Wang, accursed be its name, saw this and prepared to bring its hellish wrath down upon the Emperor, but all the furies of the demonkind are nothing before the might and power of the Divine Emperor. He took the Ju-i and smote the dragon, and beneath that single blow the demon fell. Black blood poured from its flank, and all of the other demons were swept away by the flood. Cursing, Lung Wang fled back to Hell, for it could not stand before the righteous wrath of the Emperor. And all who trusted in the Imperial Might were saved from the talons of the demons, while all who disbelieved fell that day....

Qin Shihuang's ranks advanced, casting their strange glow across the battlefield. The few thousand opposing soldiers stood their ground at the base of the Great Wall, even when Qin Shihuang's soldiers opened fire with relic crossbows. When the Guard came within a hundred yards of the remaining rebels, the sky burst open. Lung Wang, in the form of a great white dragon, swept down upon the Guard, accompanied by a horde of Spectres that attacked anything on the field that moved. Tactics and strategy dissipated into chaos. The Guard and the Spectres were well matched, each surprised by the other's strength in battle. Lung Wang made directly for the Emperor himself, but just as he closed Qin Shihuang vanished.

The Emperor had been caught unprepared, but he did possess the power to destroy the Malfean. Using Argos, he returned to where he kept the Ju-i, a magical scepter of solid jade created by Fu Xia. Uncertain of its powers, he had not wished to use it. Forced into a desperate position, however, he returned to battle wielding the Ju-i to great effect. Lung Wang had fallen upon the Guard, tearing them to pieces individually. While the unique Arcanos of the Guard had proven effective against the Spectres, Lung Wang was a more formidable foe. Nothing the Guard did significantly impaired the Dragon King. Bellowing out a challenge, the Emperor advanced upon Lung Wang and struck him with the Ju-i. The scepter rent the Malfean's Corpus, letting loose a torrent of black light. Qin Shihuang fell back as Lung Wang rose into the sky with a terrible cry. The Malfean fled the field, leaving the Emperor victorious.

Now all of the Shadowlands lay open to the Emperor. With conquest complete, Qin Shihuang turned his full attention to organizing the empire. However, in the back of his mind, the Emperor worried about what had become of Lung Wang. Fu Xia had warned him of the dangers posed by powerful Spectres, but he had not expected to confront one at this stage. Qin Shihuang knew that he would need to establish himself in the Tempest as well as the Shadowlands. Until then, he could not truly lay claim to the title of Ruler of the Dead. His original plan had called for an eventual foray into the Tempest, but he decided to move this phase forward. He refused to exist in constant fear of incursions by Spectres, Malfians and *kuei*.

## Into the Tempest

At first, the Emperor was not certain what step to take next. Since his death he had been honing his Arcanoi in preparation for this moment. Fu Xia had discussed the chaotic nature of the Tempest but had never actually been there himself, and his information, while accurate on generalities, often missed details. The mage did not truly understand the nature of death, and though he had spoken to many spirits, this was no substitute for experience. To seek true insight into this strange realm of the dead, Qin Shihuang sought out the wise teachers among the



wraiths. He dispatched messengers throughout the Shadowlands to round up scholars and philosophers.

The search was not an overwhelming success. Qin Shihuang's reputation preceded him, and most scholars feared him. Indeed, many had perished trying to prevent the Emperor's conquests. One wraith presented herself. She appeared to be a middle-aged woman, and claimed to have been dead for over 500 years. Claiming that she had studied under the greatest philosophers of China, including Tao Tzu and Confucius, she offered to reveal the secrets of the Tempest in return for a favored place at court. The Emperor was skeptical at first, and yet the woman certainly had an air of power about her.

Accompanied by a thousand of the Immortal Guard, Qin Shihuang followed her, carrying with him the Ju-i. The entourage assembled, the Emperor turned to the woman and promptly disappeared from sight with her. Only Qin Shihuang knows what followed. According to the Imperial Records, the woman was actually Lung Wang, disguised in order to lure its foe to destruction. Deep within the Tempest, the Emperor and the Malfean fought, and with the Ju-i, Qin Shihuang bent the monster to his will.

With the power of the Ju-i, the Emperor wrung the Malfean dry of its secrets. The ways of the Tempest and other darker powers were revealed, as well as the deeper secrets of jade. It was the jade of the Ju-i that had preserved the Emperor in this conflict, and which had allowed him to triumph. Eventually Qin Shihuang returned, declaring himself victorious over the very essence of Oblivion. He proclaimed the foundation of the Jade Palace in the Tempest. From there he would rule over the dead of China for all eternity, a beacon within the Tempest guiding the honorable Chinese dead to their deserving fate.

The first priority of the Emperor was to gather a large number of souls to serve as both workers and material. He ordered his local governors to collect one-tenth of the population of their commanderies. These wraiths were then sent to the Necropolis at Xi'an. Qin Shihuang gathered those skilled at forging souls and taught them what he had learned from Lung Wang. Construction on the Great Imperial Highway, leading to the Jade Palace, had begun. While construction got underway, the Emperor made his first Imperial Tour. Accompanied by a regiment of the Guard, Qin Shihuang set out to visit every province of the land. This was both a show of force and a spectacle for his subjects to behold. Many came out to see the Emperor, often out of fear, lest they be seen as disloyal.

The tour also served another purpose. The Emperor collected another group of workers for his building projects. Qin Shihuang's plan for his Palace demanded a huge number of souls, and he did not want to wait. His driving obsession was the completion of the Palace. Many of his closest advisors noticed that a change had come over the Emperor since his battle with Lung Wang, something besides the new building program. Something in the very essence of the man had changed. He

had somehow transcended what he used to be. Despite his pretensions, he had never seemed anything more than a man, or in death another wraith. Now he radiated power. His gaze pierced the soul, seeming to see into every corner of the heart. It was impossible to hide anything from him, impossible even to refuse his commands. It seemed that all that was human was gone from him. Truly, he had become Lord of the Dead.

## Expansion and Revolt

*Why are the people starving?*

*Because their rulers eat up the money in taxes.*

*Therefore the people are starving.*

*Why are the people rebellious?*

*Because the rulers interfere too much.*

*Therefore they are rebellious.*

*Why do people think so little of death?*

*Because the rulers demand too much of life.*

*Therefore people take death lightly.*

*Having little to live on, one knows better than to value life too much.*

—Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*

While the living world saw the expansion of the Han Dynasty, Qin Shihuang concerned himself with solidifying his own position. The Emperor now styled himself Lord of the Dead and so assumed a title befitting a god, but rather than take on the aspects of a traditional Taoist deity of the underworld, Qin Shihuang declared himself to be the Jade Emperor, or Yu Huang. Yu Huang was the traditional leader of the gods in the Taoist pantheon, and by assuming this title, Qin Shihuang wanted to show that he was the ultimate authority; no god was greater than he. The Emperor's word was divine law, and every subject was obliged to accept and obey his will.

It took centuries for the Jade Palace and the Imperial Highway to be completed, linking the Tempest to the Yellow Springs. During that time the Emperor ruled from his Necropolis at Xi'an. He took an active hand in affairs, establishing the Four Magistracies. In order to ensure the loyalty of the most powerful wraith families, he ordered that each of them send representatives to live in the Necropolis to serve as hostages. He continually weakened the authority of these families by promoting those loyal to him, until ultimately all power in the Kingdom came to reside within the Imperial Bureaucracy. Instead of struggling against the Emperor, families came to concentrate on jockeying with each other for positions within the government.

## The New Emperor

There has been much speculation concerning the nature of this change. In the myths of the Jade Kingdom, the battle with Lung Wang has become central to the legend of the Emperor's rise. An elaborate myth has developed, recorded in epic poetry, which recounts the mastering of Chaos by Qin Shihuang. In these tales the Emperor is shown as the bringer of order and security to the deadlands. There is another version of events, one that is circulated in resistance movements. This version holds that Lung Wang defeated Qin Shihuang in the Tempest. The Dragon King saw the potential of the Emperor's plan, and coveted the power that he could wield. He had been very impressed by the way the Guard fought his Spectre army. In defeating the Emperor, Lung Wang consumed his very soul. He then assumed the visage of Qin Shihuang and returned to the Shadowlands to lead his fanatically loyal army. Only the being wearing the Emperor's robes knows the truth.

By the third century AD, the construction of the Jade Palace was complete, and the Emperor formally inaugurated the occasion by taking another Imperial Tour. The journey was a complete circuit of the Kingdom, beginning and ending at Xi'an, which was also the base of the Imperial Highway. With great ritual and celebration, the Emperor and his Immortal Guard ascended the Highway into the Tempest to the gates of the Jade Palace. All administrative functions moved from the Shadowlands and into the Palace, as well as the Emperor's entire entourage of courtesans, advisors and other members of court. The Jade Emperor had ascended into Heaven.

In the living world, the Han Dynasty had fallen, and China had entered a period of warring states vying for control of the land. The wars and devastation sent many souls into the Underworld, and the Censors were not careful about uniting wraiths with their families. The Emperor wanted more servants to properly furnish the Palace and to serve as governmental thralls, and so the Censors claimed almost all the souls from the earthly wars, much to the chagrin of many families. Resentment toward the Emperor began to grow among many of his subjects, especially since he no longer took a personal interest in the Yellow Springs except as a source of fresh souls. The

Bureaucracy and the Military were still very much present, but some began to doubt the Emperor's claims of divinity, and the legitimacy of his rule.

The astronomical cost of Yu Huang's building program had nearly bankrupted the state, and many souls had been summarily enslaved without any regard for their families. In order to replenish his resources, the Emperor instituted a tax in souls that each region was required to provide annually. From now on, 25 percent of all souls entering the Jade Kingdom would be immediately sent to the Jade Palace for processing and eventual service to the Emperor, usually as building materials or some other form of permanent enslavement. The Censors were to determine who would be sent at random from the lists, this in addition to all those souls who were not claimed by any family and automatically sent to the Emperor.

This oppressive taxation only added to the growing feelings of resentment towards the Emperor and his government, and gradually organized revolutionary movements began to grow. The movement started with simple breaches of Imperial Law, such as not registering relics or smuggling relatives into the kingdom without bringing them before a Censor. Many families felt that it was their right to take in any of the dead from their living family who should happen to come to the Yellow Springs, and that the Emperor had no say in what was to become of them. Eventually, an extensive black market in souls and relics developed as more citizens bribed Censors to look the other way, or simply ignored them altogether.

The officials at the Palace could not ignore all this illegal activity for long, and eventually it came to the attention of the Emperor himself. He was furious that his subjects would dare so openly to defy his divine will, and ordered that his laws be restored and upheld with the greatest of force. Using information gained by the Protectors, he settled upon one of the areas of most flagrant disobedience: the populous region of Shandong. He dispatched his Immortal Guard to deal with the problem, since he felt that he could no longer trust any of his officials in the region. A troop of over 2000 Guardsmen descended on Shandong and imprisoned every wraith they came across. Great holding pens were built to contain the captive slaves, while every relic and Artifact was seized, registered or not. The Guard mercilessly cut down anyone who resisted, regardless of their rank or standing in society.

The Censors' lists from the region were totally corrupt, and it was impossible to tell how many of the wraiths had been properly processed. Instead of trying to sort out the situation and find out who was who, the Commander of the Guard choose a more direct path. He decided how many of the wraiths were probably illegal based on the number of souls the Emperor expected to receive from the region. This amounted to well over two-thirds of the population, who were then chained together, regardless of family, and marched off along the Imperial Highway to the Jade Palace. The citizens were outraged but could do nothing against the Guard, and so were

forced to submit. Those lucky enough to be left behind were enraged, and began to plot revenge.

As news of the mass enslavements at Shandong spread through the Kingdom, many feared that their region would be next. To an extent, the Emperor's plan worked; the people were afraid, and many began to abide by the laws as written, willingly paying the tax imposed upon them. Others were not so willing; they feared that the Emperor would not be satisfied with mere submission, but that all of China was likely to receive the same treatment as Shandong. They began to plot to overthrow the Emperor, so that they would never have to fear his violent oppression again. The rebels soon gathered forces from all across the Yellow Springs. They knew that the Immortal Guard was the heart of the Imperial Army, and felt that if they could destroy them, the rest of the kingdom would fall.

The Immortal Guard made its headquarters at the Necropolis at Xi'an. From here they could guard both the Imperial Highway and the Emperor's Fetters at his tomb. Some 4000 Guards, including the Commander of the Guards, were at Xi'an when the rebel army attacked. The revolt was fueled more by anger and zealousness than by careful planning, and even though they outnumbered the Guard, the offensive was clumsy and ineffectual. The Guard quickly repelled the assault and counterattacked. The rebels fled, but most were hunted down and captured before they got more than a mile away. It was the largest single collection of captive souls since the wars of unification, and was named by historians other than the Emperor's, "The First Great Revolt."

## Expansion and Conquest

Although the Emperor dealt with the First Great Revolt easily, he realized that it was symptomatic of greater problems in the Kingdom as a whole. He did not want to rule in continual fear of his subjects rising against him. He knew that while the Guard were strong enough to keep the populace in line, his kingdom could not reach its full potential if everyone was in constant fear of slavery. Yu Huang had great plans for his Kingdom; he wanted to rule all of the world's dead some day, and this could never happen unless the Chinese dead were not subservient, but supportive.

The answer lay in the deadlands that bordered the Yellow Springs. Some of the rebels who had escaped the Guard at Xi'an had fled out of the Jade Kingdom, into neighboring Shadowlands, and this drew the Emperor's attentions beyond his borders. The souls of the Mongolian, Tibetan, Korean and Japanese dead beckoned by the thousands. Yu Huang saw these regions as rich new sources for souls, souls that were not part of his kingdom and would not provoke revolt when harvested, and he was determined to fully exploit this newly realized resource.

The Protectorate sent spies to the foreign lands in order to gather information about what kind of resistance the Emperor



might meet there. At that time, most of the other East Asian Shadowlands were in a state very similar to that of China before the coming of Qin Shihuang and his army. There were no great central authorities, but rather a variety of local potentates scattered throughout the Shadowlands. Some of these ruled highly developed societies, but none of them could muster the kind of force that the Emperor could. After ascertaining that foreign expansion was feasible, the Emperor made preparations for his wars of conquest.

The first step was to build up the Imperial Army. Although the Immortal Guard was a match to any force in the realm of the dead, Yu Huang felt uneasy about sending them too far abroad. They were his only reliable assurance against further rebellions, and he did not want to be without their full protection. Yu Huang declared that, out of his own beneficence and good will towards his subjects, he would entirely repeal the law of enslavement, and allow all wraiths that were part of families to be free from fear. Henceforth, every citizen was guaranteed the right to freedom unless they violated one of the Emperor's laws and were found guilty by a Judge of the Dead. He then revealed his plans for expansion, and promised that there were great fortunes to be made by serving in the Imperial Army. Many volunteered to serve in the newly formed battalions, but that did not stop Yu Huang from drafting even more troops into service, so that by the time of the first raid against the foreigners, fully half of the population was under arms.

The Army began with simple raids into Mongolia, Tibet and Korea. These were a complete surprise to the inhabitants, who had never dreamed that such large scale military operations took place in the afterlife. Most fled before the raiding expeditions, but many others were captured by the Imperial Army. The new slaves were returned to the Jade Palace, while captured relics were doled out to the troops as booty. For over a century the raids continued in this fashion, with no permanent force being established in the foreign lands. It did not take long for the foreigners to learn how to avoid the worst of the raids, and soon the return on the invasions began to drop, until they were no longer profitable. At first Imperial Officials tried to make up for the losses by searching for new lands to raid. The armies expanded into southeast Asia and even across the sea into Japan. The latter proved to be particularly difficult, and raids on Nippon resulted in significant casualties.

Eventually, it was decided that the best way to ensure the continued supply of souls from conquered lands was to occupy them completely. Beginning with the old favorites, Mongolia and Korea, the Imperial Army launched full invasions of occupation. The defenders had grown used to merely withdrawing and waiting for the Chinese to leave after a few weeks or months. This time they began to set up permanent encampments, from which they hunted down the hiding wraiths. It took less than a decade to fully subjugate the surrounding

## Tallies for the fourth month in the Year of the Dog, two years after the conquest of the Shadowlands of Korea. (Modern Translation)

Region	Souls	Relics	Losses
Korea	1375	216	12
Mongolia	145	109	24
Nippon	37	14	129

Were it not for the high quality of the relics retrieved from our raids on Nippon, I would recommend ceasing all activities there immediately. The exceptionally high losses recorded for our operations there do not include those soldiers lost to the raids of the Bugis pirates, which this month tallied 86. However, the Bugis also sold to us 143 captive souls, more than making up for our losses.

As for the others, Mongolia continues to lag behind schedule. The relatively high number of relics retrieved is due to the fact that many Mongolian wraiths are chiefs or war leaders. The Korean numbers continue their decline, as we complete the roundup of those souls who escaped the initial occupation forces.

For the Imperial Census  
Wu Chow-Yun

territories and set up permanent Imperial Collection Camps for the collection and processing of foreign souls.

These regions became known as the Conquered Territories, and they became favorite postings for magistrates on the rise, hoping to make a fortune for their families. The newly conquered wraiths had no rights under Imperial Law, and the magistrates were free to do with them as they pleased, as long as a regular flow of souls to the Jade Palace was maintained. The Territories became horror zones, where souls were treated mercilessly, often tortured before being sent on to the Jade Kingdom. Some of the locals were allowed to remain free in return for collaboration with the Imperial Government. Small pockets of resistance remained to help new wraiths escape roving groups of Imperial Reapers, but they were doomed to fight a losing battle.

Impressed with the results of foreign occupation, Yu Huang ordered the invasion of the Shadowlands of modern-day Viet-

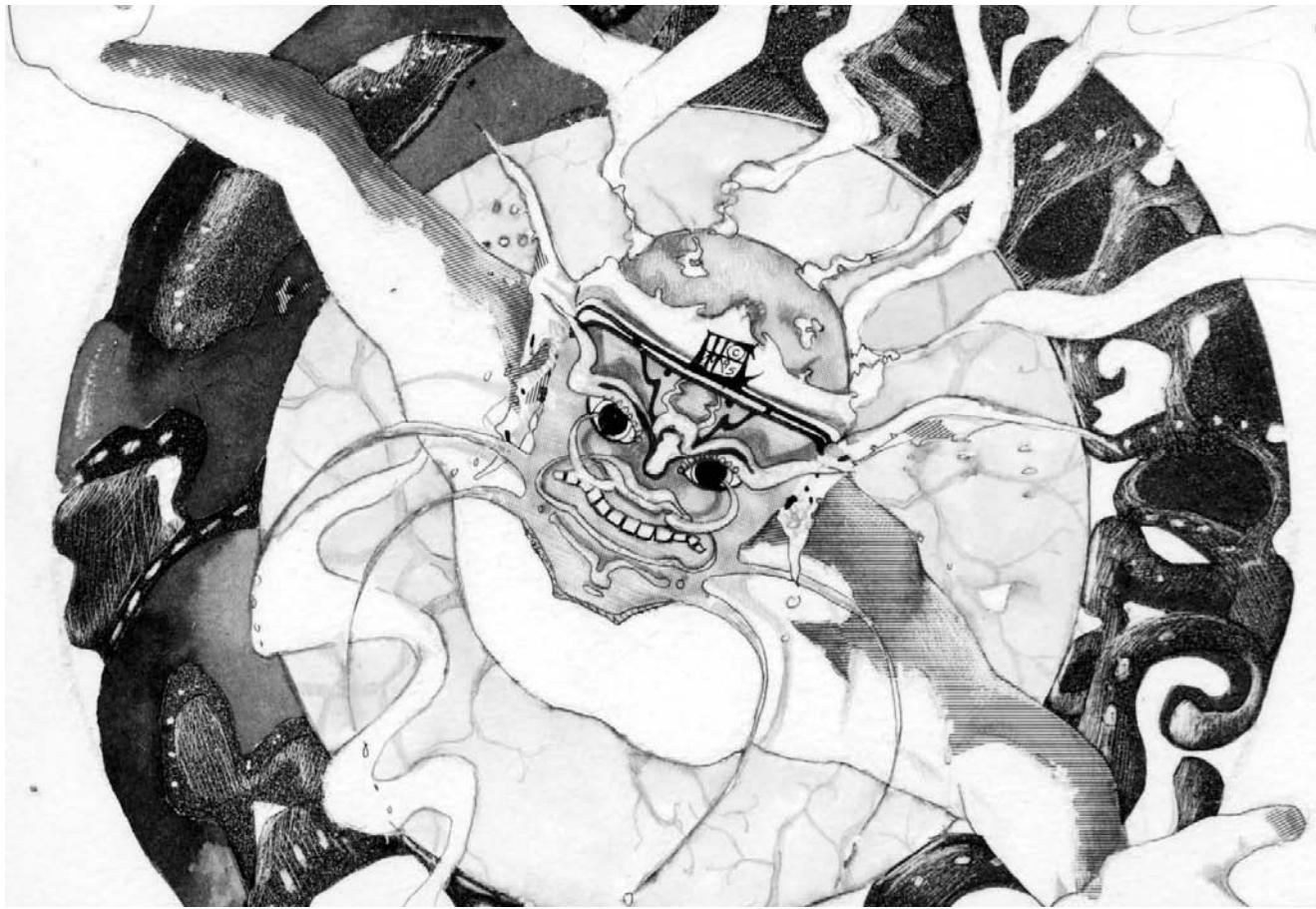
nam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. These regions proved less susceptible to total occupation, due in part to the support they were receiving from the powerful wraiths of India. Nevertheless, the Imperial Army made a significant impression on the southern kingdoms, and forced them to submit to the Emperor's suzerainty. The local rulers agreed to pay an annual tithe to the Emperor and to refrain from taking any action against the Jade Kingdom. In return, the Emperor agreed to withdraw his armies from the region. Over the succeeding centuries these vassal kingdoms tried several times to break free of Imperial Rule, but each time the Emperor has forced them back into the fold.

The last prize of the East lay before the Emperor, and now he felt that he had the resources to successfully take Japan. The Japanese wraiths had proven themselves particularly resistant to assault before, due in large part to the protection afforded them by their island home. The battle for Japan lasted well over a century, and took up a great deal of the Imperial Army's resources. While the Guard kept the peace at home, nearly the entire Army was occupied in the invasion of Japan. It was only after a dozen decades that Japan fell, but by this time a new threat had arisen in the Yellow Springs.

Another disruptive force was growing within the Kingdom, even as many families became frustrated with the Imperial System. Buddhism had its roots in India, but entered

China in the third century and quickly took root. Although Confucianism predominated within the ruling classes of China, Buddhism reached another part of the human soul. Confucius taught the virtues of filial piety and obedience to the system, and although the Emperor himself did not follow Confucian ideals, he liked their results in keeping the population under control. Buddhism, on the other hand was much more spiritual and individual, and Buddhist teachings held specific expectations about the afterlife and humanity's place within the greater cosmos. The Emperor had built his authority from Legalist and Taoist traditions, and was not prepared for this new ideological threat. Indeed, the Emperor virtually ignored reports from the Protectors concerning this upstart philosophy.

As the number of Buddhists in the Kingdom grew, they gained new followers among the Restless. The Jade Kingdom did not meet with their expectations of an afterlife, and they denied the divinity of the Jade Emperor. Many sought ways out of the Jade Kingdom, trying their luck in the Tempest in an attempt to seek Nirvana, but others felt it was their duty to attempt to unseat this rogue spirit known as the Jade Emperor. A new sect developed from traditional Buddhist teachings in the Shadowlands, spearheaded by the now-legendary One Eyed Teacher. He and his followers believed





that the Jade Kingdom represented the final obstacle on the path to enlightenment. They noted that not all souls came to the Shadowlands, and that they did not remain there forever, and surmised that only those who were karmically prepared made this final journey upon death. The totalitarian reign of the Jade Emperor represented the last challenge to the chosen few. If they could overthrow the so-called Lord of the Dead, they could open the way to Nirvana for all.

The followers of the One Eyed Teacher saw the dissatisfaction simmering within the hearts of many of the families, and sought out those sympathetic to revolution. In these early years, the magistrates were relatively lax in their duties, feeling secure under the auspices of their divine ruler and his Immortal Guard. The growing revolution found it easy to organize under the complacent eyes of the Protectors and the Military. Although they had great support, the rebels knew that the Imperial Army greatly outnumbered them, so they decided to make a decisive blow the opening to their "War to Free Heaven," also known as the Second Great Revolt.

The religious rebels choose to attack an incoming slave caravan, destined for the Jade Palace. A large group of Japanese souls was being brought to Xi'an by way of Wuhan, where the Buddhist rebels had significant sup-

port. The surprise assault even managed to overcome the small number of Immortal Guard who had been assigned to the caravan. The raid was successful, and a large number of Japanese slaves were freed and convinced to join in the war against Yu Huang. This became the predominant strategy of the Buddhists, and their numbers quickly grew through the conversion of freed slaves. Soon the Army and the Guard were forced to guard the caravans heavily, leaving other targets exposed. The war dragged on as the rebels resorted to guerrilla tactics, making raids but never facing the enemy in open battle.

The revolt was finally crushed when the One Eyed Teacher decided the time had come for a master stroke. Hearing of a massive collection of slaves being held at Xi'an, he determined to free them, win them over to his cause and, with this new army, face the Emperor in battle. He had trained a select group of his most fervent followers in the Arcanos known in the West as Inhabit. This ability was widely unknown in the Jade Kingdom, but the Teacher had learned it while abroad. This select group Inhabited the personal belongings of a group of living pilgrims making their way to the Great Wild Pagoda, which had recently been built in Xi'an. Under this cover, the Teacher and



his followers succeeded in penetrating the Imperial lines, and using Argos, secretly arrived at the holding pens for the prisoners.

The plan would have succeeded flawlessly, if the large number of souls in the pen had indeed been prisoners. When the rebels had overpowered the few guards, they opened the holding pen, only to be set upon by members of the Immortal Guard, who were disguised and waiting. The Teacher and his inner core of leaders were all captured or sent to Oblivion, and it was not long before the entire revolt was put down. A great number of the Buddhist rebels were captured and brought to the Jade Palace for sentencing. The Emperor was determined to make an example of these insurrectionists that would discourage any further revolts.

## The Foundation of Feng-tu

Although Buddhism had been the ideology behind the most recent revolt, many of the Emperor's loyal subjects were also Buddhists, and Yu Huang did not wish to persecute them all, as this would only cause more unrest. The Imperial Court was made up almost entirely of Confucians and Legalists, and no one close to the Emperor had any detailed knowledge of Buddhist beliefs, despite centuries of Buddhist wraiths arriving in the Yellow Springs. Yu Huang decided that just as he had set himself within the Taoist beliefs, so he should also see how he could turn the new religion to his own uses. He ordered that a comprehensive study of the philosophy be undertaken, and that the most knowledgeable wraiths in the kingdom be brought before him.

From this process, the Emperor learned a great deal. He had little use for the quest for Nirvana or the vagaries of karma, but one idea stirred his imagination. The Buddhists coming into China from India had brought with them the concept of Hell, which had previously been unknown in the Middle Kingdom. Apparently, many wraiths first thought that the Yellow Springs were Hell, at least until they were set straight by their new families. Yu Huang decided to take advantage of this belief by creating a Hell within the Tempest, much as he had created his own Jade Palace. There the souls of those who disobeyed the Emperor's laws could be properly punished for their crimes. This Hell could also serve as a place to break the spirits and properly enslave those souls taken from the Conquered Territories, and this distasteful practice could be moved out of the Jade Palace.

The foundations for Hell were laid with the souls of those Buddhists rebels who had been captured in the Second Great Revolt. Many of the living Chinese believed that Hell's entrance was actually located within a mountain called Feng-tu. Because of the popular beliefs surround-

ing this fabled mountain, Yu Huang chose to build the entrance to Hell in the Yellow Springs at the site of Feng-tu. Just as the Imperial Highway led from Xi'an up to the Jade Palace, so the Mountain of Feng-tu would lead down to Ti Yu, the Earth Prison. Ti Yu exists in the Tempest, where the Imperial Engineers are free to work out every conceivable kind of torture. Over the centuries, Ti Yu has continued to grow as more and more souls are sentenced to the Earth Prison.

## The Third Great Revolt

With the creation of Hell and the establishment of the Conquered Territories, the Jade Kingdom enjoyed several centuries of relative peace, free from any significant revolts or upheavals. During this time, the Bureaucracy grew more and more complex, as families became totally absorbed in expanding their influence in the government. All of this activity was possible only through the support of the souls enslaved in the Conquered Territories. While the citizens of the Jade Kingdom prospered, these oppressed peoples plotted ways to regain their freedom.

Few were able to escape the Censors and their Reapers, who constantly scoured the Shadowlands, searching for new souls. Those who did manage to escape tended to band together for protection, but in small, easily concealed groups. It is said that the first international resistance movement was formed in Korea, when freedom fighters made the dangerous journey to Japan in order to enlist the aid of the Japanese rebels. From this core group, the revolutionary movement spread throughout the Conquered Territories, searching for more allies.

The rebels knew that they would never muster the forces necessary to openly oppose the Emperor, and so they began searching for another way. They enlisted the aid of an ancient Chinese historian, Sima Qian, who had never held much love for the Emperor. Sima Qian had made a careful study of the history of Yu Huang, and knew much more about the reality behind the Emperor's power than Yu Huang would have ever suspected. He told the rebels the story of Fu Xia, and suggested that they try to find such a living man to help them overthrow the Emperor. The historian also recounted the legend of the Dagger of Jing Ke, an ancient artifact that dated from the time of Qin Shihuang's life. The dagger had been used in an assassination attempt on the living Emperor, and when the assassin died, he brought it with him into the Yellow Springs. It was rumored that the dagger had since been reworked by some of the greatest Artisans, and could send any wraith to Oblivion with but a scratch.

The rebels set about searching for a living mage who could help them and the semi-mythical dagger. It took



decades before any progress was made, but eventually, they were able to establish contact with a powerful mage who might be induced to help them. Her name was Apina, an Indonesian mage of what would become the Dreamspeaker Tradition. Apina had heard of Fu Xia's aid to Qin Shihuang, and was interested in learning more about how the ancient mage had helped the Emperor. While the rebels went on searching for the dagger, Apina tried to find a way to counteract the power of the Immortal Guard.

After years of research, Apina thought she had found a way, although she could do little to help the rebels directly. She discovered that the Immortal Guard did not draw on the living for Pathos, but instead depended upon the total consumption of souls. A human soul was enough to satiate one Guardsman for several years, and that while they were feeding, they could do nothing else. Apina thought that a skilled Artisan might find a way to create an Artifact that would force the Guard to feed on the spot, thus immobilizing him. Of course, this would require that someone be sacrificed to each Guard that they wanted to be immobilized.

Eventually, the would-be assassins found the dagger of Jing Ke, or what they thought was the dagger, for there was no way to be certain. An Artisan named Wu Fang Choi was able to create the Artifact that Apina had envisioned, using a significant amount of the rebellion's jade reserves and investing it with the Way of The Scholar and a variation of Inhabit. All was ready, and the rebels began the Third Great Revolt. Although the rebel organization was small, it had representatives throughout the Conquered Territories, all of whom simultaneously rose up in revolt, along with many sympathizers in the Jade Kingdom itself. This caused the Immortal Guard to mobilize and fan out through the kingdom.

A small team had already infiltrated the region around Xi'an, and were able to slip up the Imperial Highway under the cover of their Argos, carrying with them Wu Fang Choi's device. The assassins had discovered a little-used entrance to the Palace that supposedly led directly to the Emperor's chambers. The door was blocked by five Guardsmen, and the assassins' only hope was Choi's creation. Within the device were the souls of over a hundred rebels, who had volunteered to give their lives over to the cause of destroying Yu Huang. When activated, the device forced one of these souls into a Guardsman, who immediately devoured it and was thus immobilized. The device worked as predicted, and within an instant, the five Guardsmen were glowing brightly, totally occupied in the consumption of the proffered souls. The assassins rushed past them and into the Palace.

The door did lead into the Emperor' private chambers, but the rebels did not count on the fact that the Emperor maintained over 250 separate private wings within the

Palace, and he did not happen to be in the one they had infiltrated. There began a desperate hunt through the palace which lasted for three days. The assassins searched for the Emperor, all the while becoming more and more lost in the complex passageways of the Palace. Guardsmen stalked the corridors to hunt them down, as gradually their supply of sacrificial souls dwindled. The assassins gave up any hope of finding the Emperor, who was now aware of their presence and too well guarded to approach, instead trying to make their escape.

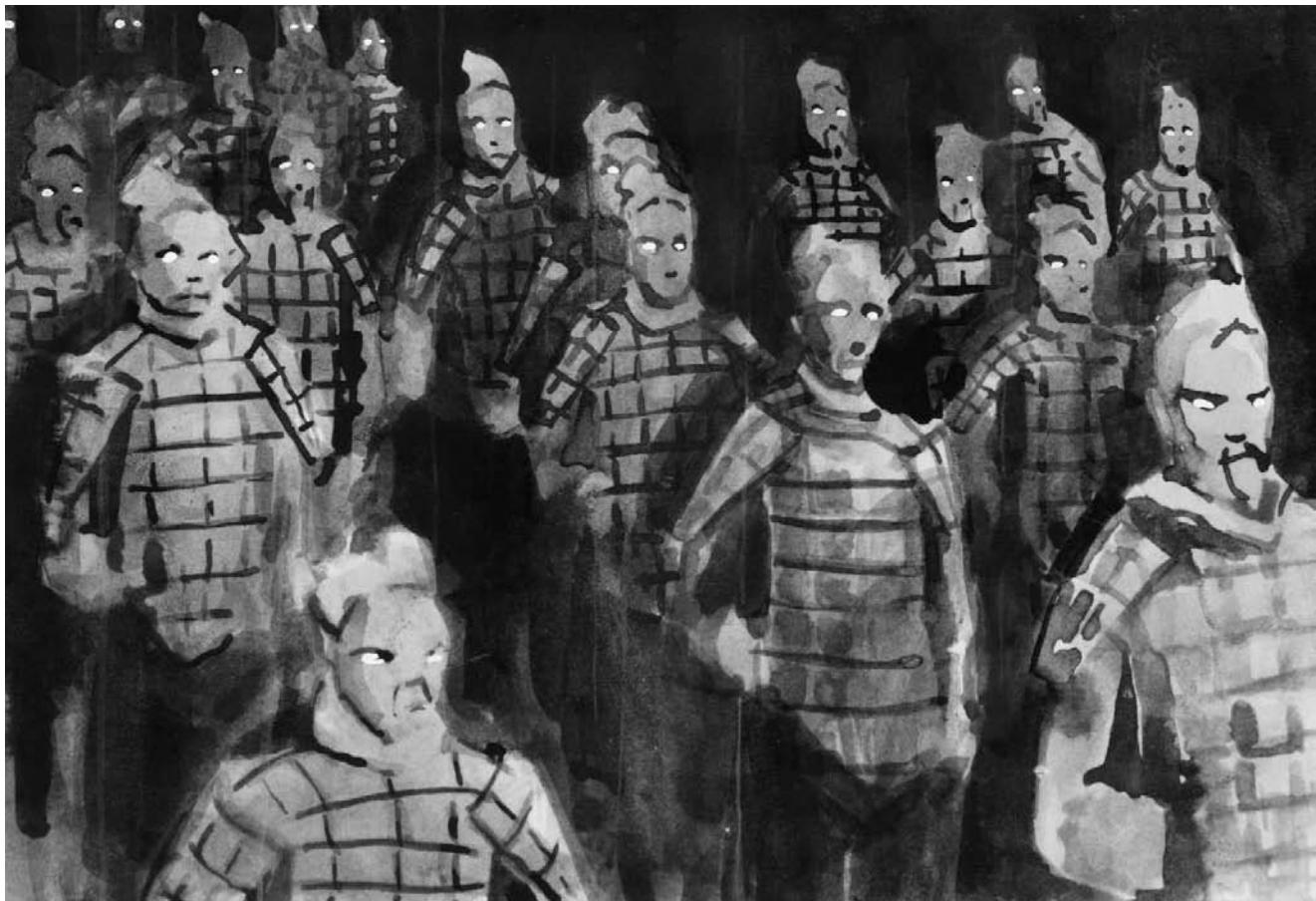
The assassins managed to fight their way out of the Palace, only to be chased down on the Imperial Highway. Using the Dagger of Jing Ke, the leader of the assassins managed to cut down several of his pursuers, but eventually he succumbed to the Guardsmen's arrows. The rebellions in the Conquered Territories and the Yellow Sprigs were easily put down, since they were intended only as distractions. Most of the rebels managed to escape capture, and remained to continue to plot against Yu Huang's tyranny. The Emperor himself was said to be quite distressed at the techniques used by the assassins to get past his Guards, and began to search for a way to protect his soldiers against it. Through the torture of one of the captured rebels, the Emperor learned who had created the device, and quickly had Wu Fang Choi brought to Hell for questioning. What became of him and the secrets of the device is unknown.

## Recent Times



In the past two centuries, the Chinese have had increasing contact with the rest of the world. While early emperors tried to keep China aloof from the West, European nations forced themselves into China. The Jade Emperor reigned for nearly 2000 years before he took an interest in these foreign devils. Before that time he had thought of them as barbarians in the hinterland, unimportant and not worthy of conquering, and certainly not a threat to his rule. As more and more Westerners died in Asia, the Jade Censors would routinely send them directly to Feng-tu for processing, but trouble began with the more permanent Western settlements in cities like Macao and Hong Kong. Representatives from Stygia began to claim the souls of their own kind before the Censors could get their hands on them. At first the Censors would not stand for this, and several of the early Stygian outposts in the Jade Kingdom were summarily destroyed by the Imperial Army.

This wholesale destruction and enslavement led Charon to send an official delegation to see the Emperor. The ambassadors arrived at the base of the Imperial Highway



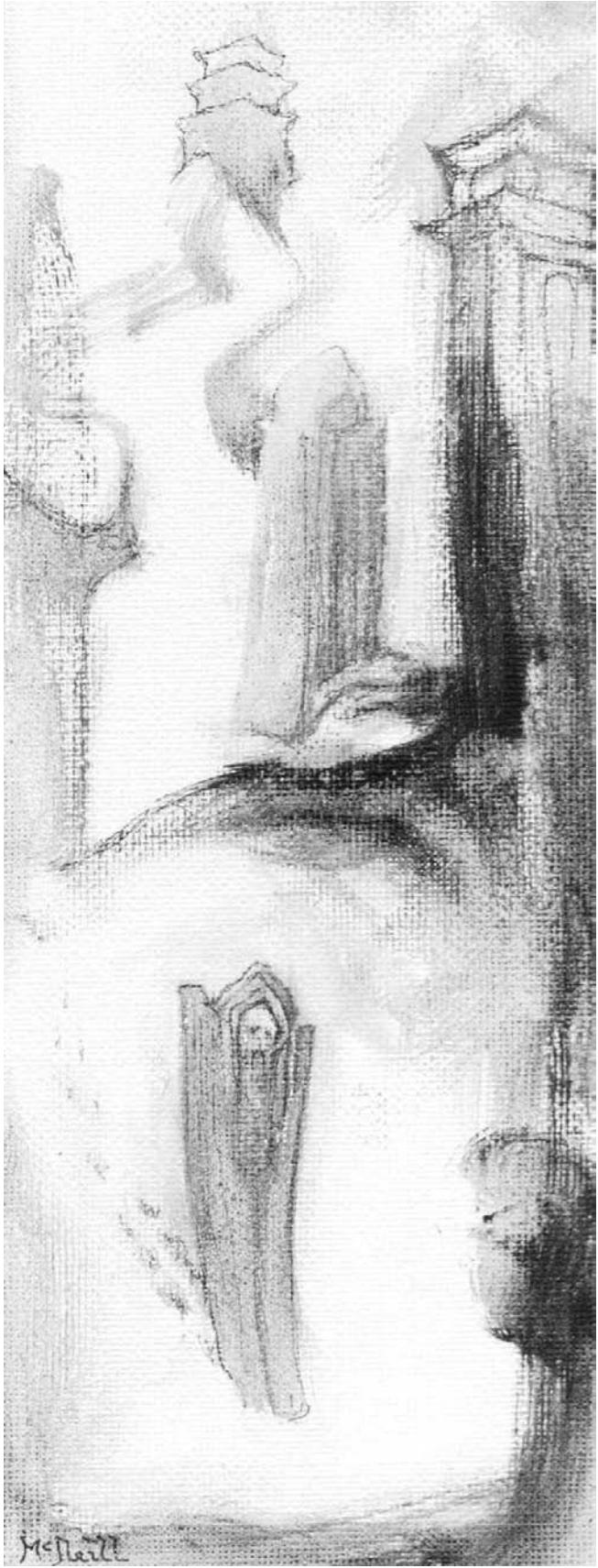
at Xi'an, where they were met by the Commander of the Immortal Guard. The Stygians had heard rumors of the Guard, but were not prepared for the sight of an army of eerily glowing warriors. The Commander inquired as to their business, and the Stygian ambassador demanded an audience with the Emperor to discuss reparations for the destruction of a Hierarchy outpost. The Commander bade the ambassador follow the Highway to a place called Fengtu, where he would be treated with all due respect. One of the ambassadors was permitted to return to Stygia with the message that the Emperor would not be ordered about and reserved the right to claim any soul in his domain. Charon responded with a series of lightning raids performed by crack troops of the Skeletal Legion, and a state of unofficial war existed between the two realms.

While some Westerners did die in the Jade Kingdom, a great many more Chinese were dying within the confines of Stygia, working on the railroads and seeking their fortunes in America. They had brought with them their own creeds and customs, and wraith families had been developing across the Pacific. Although nominally members of the Hierarchy, many of these families retained close ties with their relatives in the Jade Kingdom. After the enslavement of the ambassadors, the Hierarchy cracked down on

Chinese wraiths in Stygia, rounding them up in camps and placing them in chains. Their relatives at home sought the aid of the Emperor in this matter, and after several years of politicking and lobbying at court, they persuaded the Emperor to take action against Stygia.

Under the command of General Peng Xin, the Emperor sent a war fleet to ravage part of Stygia. Peng Xin was given only a small number of warships that could navigate the Tempest all the way to Stygia, and he knew that he could not accomplish much against the Hierarchy defenses. In order to bolster his invasion force, and add more transport capacity, Peng made a deal with the dread ghost fleets of the Bugis. The Bugis had long sailed from their homes in Indonesia and ravaged the rest of Southeast Asia, and in death they became even more fearsome as marauding pirates who did not fear the Tempest and had dealings with Spectres. The Bugis captains agreed to help Peng and his army in exchange for half the booty and a large advance payment in White Jade goods. Drawing upon the resources of the Conquered Territories, Peng paid his mercenaries, and the invasion fleet set sail.

As far as the Emperor was concerned, all of the West was part of the Hierarchy, from the Americas to Europe, and Peng was free to choose his target. Word of the mas-



sive invasion fleet had spread to Stygia, and the Legions were preparing to defend the western coast against an attack. However, because of his Bugis allies, Peng was able to navigate through the Tempest and attack anywhere he pleased, and so he chose the Hierarchy Citadel at Boston. The Bugis opened a great rift in the Tempest, and emerged into the Boston Harbor of the Shadowlands, wailing their battle cries and setting upon the Necropolis.

What happened next is confused. According to the Emperor's historians, Boston was sacked, and any Hierarchy attempts at retribution were easily put down. Charon's records note that the Boston garrison was able to beat off the invaders easily and the fight was carried to the Emperor. The Ivory Queen, in the midst of her own conflict with Stygia, threatened alliance with the Emperor and won certain concessions, including the city of New Orleans, as Charon did not want a two-front war.

What is certain is that the Hierarchy quickly removed the Emperor's first strike capability by buying off the Bugis, and that the war ground down into a stalemate. The Legions had too much territory to cover to be massed against the Emperor in force, while Yu Huang refused to use his greatest weapon, the Immortal Guard, outside of his own Kingdom for fear of revolt. Eventually an uneasy truce was made, and negotiations began on how to deal with the problem of foreign souls. The final treaty was composed of several parts, consisting of an agreement to make no raids or incursions against each other, the establishment of permanent embassies and the declaration that each of the Kingdoms had the express right to those souls whose ancestry could be traced back to their Kingdom. Thus, all Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tibetan, Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian and Laotian souls, no matter where they died, were recognized as the falling within the purview of the Jade Emperor, while Stygia retained the right to claim any Western souls no matter where they fell. The Ivory Queen also signed the treaty, but none of the other Dark Kingdoms were signatories, and souls from these regions were still considered fair game under the terms of the agreement.

The treaty held for a few decades, long enough for a Midnight Express stop to be constructed in Hong Kong, but Eastern Asia was changing in ways the Emperor could never imagine. American ideals were permeating the Chinese consciousness, as were the ideas of Marx and Lenin. Living Japan waxed imperialistic, and as her troops fell throughout Asia, more and more Japanese wraiths and *kuei* appeared in the Shadowlands, sometimes heavily armed with relics. The invasion of Manchuria, which brought vast numbers of Nipponese dead to the Chinese mainland, spread thousands of rebellious Japanese wraiths throughout the Yellow Springs themselves, and at times even the Guard was hard-pressed to contain them.

**From:** Andrea Katsulas, Anacreon of Fate, Vilnius

**To:** All Legionnaires, 4th District

**Re:** Souls from the East

Be advised that the treaty which Charon signed with the Jade Emperor is still in effect, and all foreign souls are expected to be sent to Gdansk for processing and eventual shipment to Asia. Spur rail lines are being constructed to facilitate these transfers.

As for Asian spirits who seek admission to our Necropoli, they are to be treated with the utmost courtesy so long as they engage in no behaviors considered seditious. Each should be under constant surveillance, and any attempt to make contact with Renegade or Heretic elements should be reported immediately. Those Asian wraiths breaking the Dictum Mortuum or engaging in seditious activities are subject to immediate arrest. Those arrested are to be sent to Warsaw for interrogation, though each should be offered the opportunity to defect prior to shipment.

In the midst of this confusion, Charon spied an opening. Convinced that the Emperor had been illegally harvesting Western souls, Charon trumped up charges relating to San Francisco's Chinatown, and sent massive forces across the Sea of Shadows. Two full Legions made the assault, but rather than attack the Yellow Springs, they halted at Japan.

As Japan and America fought in the Skinlands, Japanese soldiers and their weapons began to show up in great numbers in the Conquered Territories. It had been centuries since there had been an organized uprising in the Conquered Territories, and the magistrates in charge of Japan had grown careless, made complacent by the riches brought by war. Whole units of Japanese soldiers died and found themselves in a world ruled by their hated enemies, the Chinese. By 1944, the Japanese dead had built up their forces to such a level that they challenged the Emperor's rule of the islands. Using modern relic weapons and war machines, and with help from Stygia, the rebels launched an all-out assault on the Chinese Redistribution Centers. In a period of weeks, the whole of Japan was freed from Imperial Rule. The most important victory occurred at the

provincial capital at Kyoto, where a small unit of Immortal Guard was overwhelmed and destroyed by the freedom fighters. Content that they'd set up an ally and weakened an enemy, the Legions returned home.

Upon hearing the news, the Emperor lashed out at his ministers in a rage. His entire rule was based upon the resources supplied by the Conquered Territories, and he could not afford to lose Japan. Moreover, the Japanese, and perhaps the Westerners, could help other territories revolt; even now, small-scale rebellions were erupting throughout the Empire. The Emperor called up the entire Army and the Immortal Guard, and ordered the immediate retaking of Japan, with command given to then current Commander-in-Chief of the Military, General Wu. Wu had served in this position for centuries, and was known as a skillful and fearsome military commander. While the Immortal Guard secured peace within the Yellow Springs, Wu set forth against China with the majority of the Imperial Army.

The initial landing was a success, thanks in a large part to the Bugis mercenaries who had once again been enlisted to help the Emperor. Despite their earlier treachery, Wu needed their abilities to navigate large numbers through the Tempest. Abandoned by their erstwhile allies, the Japanese wraiths fought a brilliant guerrilla war, holding the vastly superior Chinese force at bay. Nevertheless, it seemed a lost cause; the Chinese troops far outnumbered the Japanese, and most of the modern relics had been used up in the fight for liberation. Hope came only when a sage highly skilled in the use of Fatalism noticed the large numbers of doomed people in the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He discerned what was about to take place there, and realized that a great Maelstrom would probably ensue.

The Japanese commanders gathered their troops at Hiroshima, hoping to lure the Chinese into making an all-out assault. General Wu took the bait, and most of the Japanese troops had taken cover. Wu took the city easily, and most of his troops were within the city when the first atomic bomb exploded over the city. A huge nihil opened, and the Great Maelstrom broke upon the Shadowlands. The storm swept away Wu's army, while Spectres fell upon all who managed to survive. Two-thirds of the Imperial invasion force were lost to Oblivion, as were thousands of newly dead souls, created by the atomic blast. The Japanese army, having been prepared, survived relatively intact, and was able to begin rebuilding in preparation for a new Chinese assault.

General Wu had managed to escape the storm by using his Argos ability, and returned to the Jade Palace to beg the Emperor's forgiveness. He tried to explain to the Emperor what had happened, but Yu Huang would accept no excuses. In a terrible rage, the Emperor let loose his anger in a manner unprecedented and undreamed of by any at court. Yu Huang raised his arms, and a great cloud of darkness poured forth

to envelop the disgraced general. Wu cried out in agony as the blackness devoured him. All who witnessed the display fled in terror. The Emperor was not seen for several weeks after this incident, and when he returned, he forbade any of his ministers to ever speak of Wu again. Peng Xin, the hero of the war with Stygia, was appointed his replacement, and life continued.

## Post World War II

The atomic explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki sent a great Maelstrom sweeping across all the realms of the dead. For weeks, the Jade Kingdom cowered before the storm, with wraiths seeking what shelter they could in their respective Haunts and manor houses. The storm destroyed portions of the Imperial Highway between the Yellow Springs and the Jade Palace, as well as causing serious damage to most of the official Imperial buildings throughout the kingdom. Even the Necropolis at Xi'an was in need of extensive repairs, and most wraith families lost their homes.

In the wake of this destruction, the rebellions against Imperial Rule grew even stronger, as many felt that the Emperor had lost his divine mandate as Lord of the Dead. The official Imperial Policy was that the Maelstrom had been a

punishment from Yu Huang himself as retribution against all his disloyal subjects, but few accepted this explanation. Fortunately, the Immortal Guard was still mostly intact and loyal, and the Emperor immediately dispatched them against the myriad local revolts. The Guard quickly secured the area around their base at Xi'an, and from there they proceeded to secure the rest of the kingdom. At the first show of aggressiveness by the Guard, most of the rebels gave up the fight, realizing that the Emperor still possessed the ability to command their loyalty. Within a few short months, the majority of China was again firmly under control, and the war to bring back the Conquered Territories could begin.

Having soundly defeated the Imperial Army, the Japanese wraiths began to dismantle the Jade Kingdom's governmental structure and set up their own. Unfortunately, the rebels soon fell into fractional politics, and could not form a cohesive government. Some wanted to simply be left to their death in peace, and were not concerned with forming any sort of society of the dead. Others wanted a system much like that of their former oppressors, one that ensured laws and protection for all Japanese wraiths. Still another group wanted to press the battle against the Emperor, and help other Conquered Territories escape from Yu Huang's domination. Constant bickering between the factions made



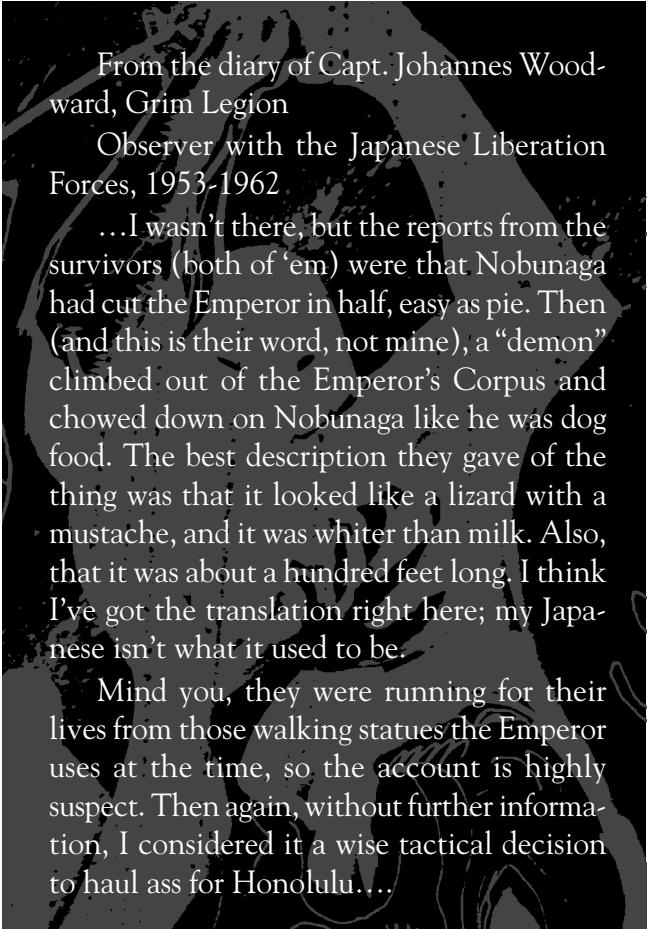


it easy for the Emperor's spies to infiltrate the Japanese provisional government and learn of their plans. While he rebuilt his forces on the mainland, the Emperor used his influence to create further discord among the revolutionaries, giving covert aid first to one side and then another.

The other Conquered Territories were not able to break away as easily as Japan. The inland areas, such as Mongolia and Tibet, did not have large resistance movements, and Imperial Forces soon reclaimed them. The local warlords of Southeast Asia were soon forced into submission by a large force of Immortal Guardsmen, and all save Bangkok resumed making regular tribute payments to the Imperial Coffers. The Koreans had more luck, thanks in a large part to their valiant National Dragons, elite soldiers who had been Moliated and joined together, forming huge beasts to fight against the Chinese oppressors. It was not until after the Korean War that the Jade Kingdom fully reincorporated the Korean peninsula. During the war, many Stygians took advantage of the Jade Kingdom's weak position in Korea, and began to reap and capture Korean souls that died during the war. This deprived the rebels of much needed reinforcements, while the high Chinese casualties reinvigorated the Chinese offensive in the afterlife. A final push in 1953, spearheaded by the Immortal Guard, finally crushed the last of the rebels and killed the last handful of National Dragons.

With the rest of his holdings secure, the Emperor turned his full attention to the Japanese problem. Despite the vicissitudes of politics and the Emperor's disruptive influence, the Japanese were growing stronger with each passing year, and they knew what to expect from the Emperor. Left alone, Japan would represent a constant threat to the Emperor's position, for Japan would always be a rallying point for future rebellions. Without the souls provided by the Conquered Territories, the Imperial Economy would collapse. The Emperor would once again have to rely on Chinese souls, and this would no doubt cause further rebellions. Not wanting to risk any more mistakes of the kind that had destroyed Wu and his army, the Emperor choose the nearly unprecedented step of leading the invasion force himself, at the head of the Immortal Guard. In 2000 years, the Emperor had not led his troops in battle, and it had been well over a millennium since he had left the Jade Palace. His great Fetter at Xi'an was still intact, though, and he was able to come into the Yellow Springs without any difficulty.

Yu Huang sailed down the Yangtze in a ship of solid True Jade, at the head of a great armada. Japanese wraiths, manning ghost ships from the Second World War, met them in the Sea of Japan. In the ensuing battle, several of the Emperor's ships were lost with all hands, although wherever he went, the Emperor, wielding the Ju-i, cut down all opposition. The armada forced a passage to Japan, and



From the diary of Capt. Johannes Woodward, Grim Legion

Observer with the Japanese Liberation Forces, 1953-1962

...I wasn't there, but the reports from the survivors (both of 'em) were that Nobunaga had cut the Emperor in half, easy as pie. Then (and this is their word, not mine), a "demon" climbed out of the Emperor's Corpus and chowed down on Nobunaga like he was dog food. The best description they gave of the thing was that it looked like a lizard with a mustache, and it was whiter than milk. Also, that it was about a hundred feet long. I think I've got the translation right here; my Japanese isn't what it used to be.

Mind you, they were running for their lives from those walking statues the Emperor uses at the time, so the account is highly suspect. Then again, without further information, I considered it a wise tactical decision to haul ass for Honolulu....



Yu Huang led a lightning assault. He attacked and captured the rebels wherever they hid, for his spies had already revealed most of their bunkers and plans. Knowing the cause was lost, one of the Japanese generals, the legendary Oda Nobunaga, challenged the Emperor to single combat. If the Emperor would put aside the Ju-i, the general would fight him, and if the Emperor won, all of the remaining rebels would freely submit to the rule of the Jade Kingdom.

Laughing, the Emperor gladly agreed, and put aside the Ju-i. The Japanese general, wielding an ancient Artifact sword, charged the Emperor, slicing clean through his body. The Emperor's body collapsed into two halves, to the thunderous cheering of the onlooking Japanese. The Immortal Guard merely looked on impassive, waiting. From Yu Huang's bisected Corpus, there shone a dull gray light, and from within the body emerged first one great claw, and then another, and then a tremendous, bestial head. The general stood and watched in horror as the beast within the Emperor lunged forward with a roar. Without a sound, the Immortal Guard fell upon the awestruck rebels, cutting them down to a man. When the battle had ended, Yu Huang stood in the center of the field, unscathed.



## Modern Complications

After decades of turmoil, Yu Huang had succeeded in returning his kingdom to its ante-bellum status, having defeated the last vestiges of opposition in Japan. Forced out of his refuge in the Tempest, he was ready to return there, hoping to again escape from the drudgeries of ruling. The Bureaucracy was reestablished, and new magistrates replaced those who had been killed or who had rebelled against Imperial Rule. The Emperor declared a Thousand Years of Peace as a reward to the good and noble citizens of the Empire, promising that there would be no more disturbances among the dead. With this decree, he again disappeared behind a wall of ministers, advisors and courtiers.

In the living world, China had changed drastically while Yu Huang fought to restore his authority. Mao Ze-dong's Communist Revolution had succeeded by 1949, and China had a new, radical government. Many Communist revolutionaries had died and gone to the Yellow Springs during the Fourth Great Revolt, and most had been quickly assimilated into the Imperial Army. Now, in more peaceful times, many of these revolutionaries began to come together, forming families based on false relationships, hoping to overthrow the tyranny of the afterlife. These families kept up widespread nets of contacts with each other, slowly expanding their numbers as more and more of these patriots entered the afterlife.

Living society under the Communist Party changed dramatically from its earlier Imperial and Nationalist incarnations. The old traditions of honoring ancestors and other religious practices came to be thought of as superstitions that were inimical to the People. With the coming of the Cultural Revolution, many ancestral tablets were destroyed, as all of China underwent a period of tremendous violence and repression. The dead of the Jade Kingdom began to grow weak, as fewer and fewer of the living observed the proper rites of respect for the dead. The government of The People's Republic often separated families, causing equally traumatic effects in the afterlife. All the while the radical Chinese dead grew stronger on the Passions of their living counterparts, and they succeeded in gaining control of many of the important magistracies in the heavily urbanized districts. By using these offices' powers, they strengthened the power of the artificial "Communist families" to the point that they came to dominate in several of the most populous Necropoli.

Death affects all that it touches, and Communist ideology did not prove flexible enough to deal with its effects on the human mind. In the Yellow Springs, each person has known death, and most fear something much worse will come if they should die again. They know of Feng-tu and of Oblivion, and they know enough to fear the power of the Emperor and his

Immortal Guard. There are few ideologies worth fighting for among the dead, and soon the Communist party moved from thoughts of a class war to merely surviving death intact. The leaders realized that there would be no popular rule among the dead, for the established families were too powerful and had the support of a powerful Emperor. They decided that their hope lay in the "Communist families" they had created, and they planned to forge a new aristocracy within the confines of the Imperial System.

It took some time for the established families to realize what the Communists were up to, and by that time, they had become entrenched. In the major cities, such as Shanghai, Beijing and Nanjing, the Communist families hold the majority of magistracies, and even hold some posts at the commandery and provincial level. The traditional families now fight by political means to keep them from expanding any further. The Emperor turns a deaf ear to any complaints about the Communists, knowing they will not dare challenge him while eroding the power of some of the more influential traditional families.

Yu Huang will tolerate no violence within the Jade Kingdom, so the two sides are forced to fight their battles through the political systems. They fling lawsuits at each other like arrows, sometimes to the point of paralyzing the Bureaucracy. It is only on these occasions that the Imperial Court will take a reluctant hand in sorting out the situation.

Despite this political infighting, there is at least a semblance of order in the Jade Kingdom, and the ministers at court see this as an opportunity to expand their influence abroad. Since the disappearance of Charon in Stygia, many see a chance to expand Imperial Interests in the West. Agents of the Protectorate and the Army have infiltrated scores of cities throughout the Americas and Europe, relaying information back to the Jade Palace. In Western cities with large Chinese populations, virtual enclaves of the Jade Kingdom have been set up with varying degrees of success. More and more resources are sent into Stygia in an effort to undermine Hierarchy authority by bribing its members into serving the Emperor. There are no plans for an invasion as yet, but many in both Kingdoms consider it only a matter of time.





# Chapter Three: The Government

*If men are not afraid to die,  
It is of no avail to threaten them with death.  
If men live in constant fear of dying,  
And if breaking the law means that a man will be killed,  
Who will dare to break the law?  
There is always an official executioner.  
If you try to take his place,  
It is like trying to be a master carpenter and cutting wood.  
If you try to cut wood like a master carpenter, you will only hurt your hand.*

— Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*

**T**he current form of the Jade Empire is the product of centuries of evolution. When his rule began, the Emperor was intimately involved in the daily governing of the Kingdom. He decided every question that arose, from the reaping of souls to the establishing of individual Haunts. Qin Shihuang spent little time in his Necropolis, preferring to travel throughout the kingdom while the Jade Palace was constructed in the Tempest. The Imperial Tours had set circuits through the Shadowlands so that his subjects could prepare to greet him properly. Everywhere the Emperor would investigate his magistrates, making sure they were loyal and efficient.

As time wore on, the Imperial Tours grew more infrequent. Qin Shihuang spent more and more time within the halls of the Jade Palace, ruling through ministers and officials. Today, the Emperor seldom ventures forth from the Jade Palace, but nevertheless keeps an active hand in government through his ever-expanding Bureaucracy. Well over one-third of the population is actively involved in the government, filling the vast number of specialized administrative positions.

## A Philosophy of Governing

In life, Qin Shihuang strongly supported the philosophy of Legalism. Developed by a philosopher named Han Feizi, Legalism was one of many philosophies to spring up in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Legalism laid out the appropriate ways for rulers and subjects to interact in a practical, if not terribly moral format. Westerners might easily compare them with the writings of Machiavelli.

Han Feizi set forth seven basic principles for governing. The subjects of the Jade Kingdom are all too familiar with them:

**One:** Know and compare all the various possibilities.

**Two:** Punish failure with unvarying severity to maintain the awe in which the ruler is held.

**Three:** Grant generous and reliable rewards for success.

**Four:** Listen to all views, and hold the proposer accountable for every word.

**Five:** Issue unfathomable orders and make deceptive assignments.

**Six:** Conceal one's own knowledge when making inquiries of a minister.

**Seven:** Speak in opposites and act in contraries.



This philosophy has spread from the Emperor down through his ministers and officials. All magistrates are required to learn the basic tenets of Legalist philosophy as well as the laws of the Kingdom. Since writing materials are at a premium in the Shadowlands, this involves a great deal of memorization. Sound judgment and good leadership skills are less useful than a good memory when seeking a government post.

## The System of Government

*The more laws and restrictions there are,  
The poorer people become.  
The sharper men's weapons,  
The more troubled the land.  
The more ingenious and clever men are,  
The more strange things happen.  
The more rules and regulations,  
The more thieves and robbers.*

— Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*

here are four divisions within the government structure of the Jade Kingdom: the Protectors of the Prosperous Realm, the Judges of the Dead, the Imperial Army and the Jade Censors. These four ministries are equal in power and completely independent of each other. At every level of the government there are representatives of the four divisions operating independently of, and often in competition with, each other. The Protectors of the Prosperous Realm are responsible for ensuring the loyalty and devotion of the Emperor's subjects. The Judges of the Dead preside over the enforcement of the Emperor's laws. The Imperial Army provides for the defense of the realm from internal and external threats. The Jade Censors are responsible for counting and cataloging all of the souls and relics in the kingdom, as well as enforcing policy regarding the reaping of souls.

The Jade Kingdom is divided into a hierarchy of administrative units for each level of society. China is primarily an agrarian nation, with most of the population engaged in farming. For this reason many wraiths reside in rural areas, existing on their ancestral lands. The rural village is the smallest administrative unit. Often only a few wraiths dwell in the Shadowlands attendant to a village. Government officials in these villages often end up serving in more than one capacity, for example serving as both a Censor and leader of the Militia. These rural areas are often unsafe in times of war or discord in the living world, when large numbers of *kuei* roam the Shadowlands, and at these times most village wraiths will flee to the nearest city.

Larger towns typically have large enough populations to support representatives from each of the Four Branches of Gov-



ernment. The Four Magistrates, as they are called, each have several assistants to help them carry out their duties, and have authority over the officials in the surrounding villages. Village wraiths turn to the Four when they are unsatisfied with a decision from a local magistrate. Many towns are dominated by a few wraith families who have asserted themselves over time. Typically members of one family will hold two or more of the town magistracies, as well as filling the staff positions.

Above the town magistrates are the district magistrates. Districts are composed of groupings of towns and rural areas. District magistrates usually have a central seat of power, from which they and their staff oversee the lesser officials in their region. Appeals from the lower jurisdictions are sent up to the proper district authority before being passed on. Individual families are seldom able to retain any lasting influence over a district posting, as these are highly prized and influential offices.

On par with the district magistrates are those of the city. In effect each city comprises its own district, with its magistrates' power ending at the city walls. City magistrates have a great deal of power, as they rule over densely populated areas. The city is in turn divided into sectors and neighborhoods, each with its own officials from the Four Branches. A city has all the bureaucracy of rural areas, but packed into a far smaller

area. Since there are more wraith families present in the city, the competition for government posts here is even fiercer than in the rural districts.

Over the cities and districts are the commanderies. These are collections of a few cities and the surrounding rural districts. Commanders from each Branch watch over the goings on of the lesser officials. The position of Commander carries great honor without much responsibility. The Commanders have no set duties, other than watching over their commanderies. They are free to pursue their own interests, as long as they coincide with those of the Emperor. Commanders often make surprise inspections, hoping to catch some official in a compromising position and thus replace them with a more acceptable candidate.

The Jade Kingdom is divided into 34 provinces, each with a Governor and representatives of the Four Branches. The Governor is the mouthpiece of the Emperor, chosen at court. Governors have final say over most decisions within the province, although they leave the daily governing to the other magistrates. Because they wield so much power, they are closely watched by the Imperial Court, and even the slightest hint of disloyalty brings disaster. Surprisingly, even on this level the Emperor seldom interferes. He only takes personal interest in a very few cases, and most of those end with the utter destruction of the accused.

## Corruption

In a institution as old and as large as the Imperial Bureaucracy, corruption is fact of life. Family influence and political favors have more to do with the enforcement of laws than the letter of the law.

An entire culture of corruption exists, wherein no one expects the government to function according to the law. Since all acknowledge the corruption and work within it, the corrupt system continues to serve the needs of the government, although there are periodic attempts to remove the taint. These usually consist of charging various officials with treason and executing them, and are generally political power moves rather than true attempts at reform.

One of the main reasons for the incredible corruption is that few of the laws are widely known. Paper products are rare, as paper made from souls is expensive. Cost makes the widespread distribution of legal texts impossible, especially given the high level of legislative output from the Palace. Instead, officials are required to memorize all of the laws, causing most to resort to Eunuchs instead. Even so, most officials cannot hope to keep up on all the laws,

not do they try. Instead they bluff, making up laws as they go along. This means that legal standards can vary wildly from district to district, and the same magistrate is liable to change his or her mind from one decision to another.

The Bureaucracy is the primary method by which a family achieves influence. Each family strives to place its own members in prominent positions. Most officials could not obtain their rank without the aid of their family, and are expected to serve their family before their office. Thus officials nearly always bend or break the law for the benefit of their family, and family members use their political influence not only to help themselves, but as a medium of exchange. Bribery is commonplace in the government, and many families depend on the wealth obtained through bribes to support their other activities. Most officials are able to retire from their post with a huge accumulation of favors owed to them. Some use the influence to help them find P'eng Lai, but most use it for their family, both living and dead.

## Imperial Court

The Jade Palace is the political center of the Jade Kingdom, from which all authority emanates. It is here where the Four Great Magistrates sit in office. It is to the Jade Palace that emissaries from foreign lands come, seeking audience with the Emperor. From here, Qin Shihuang controls his vast Kingdom.

The Imperial Court has grown up around the person of the Emperor. What started as a group of advisors and servants has grown into a monolithic institution. A maze of bureaucracy and ritual surrounds the Emperor, effectively cutting him off from the world, except for a few choice advisors. The details of government are all left to court officials, leaving the Emperor free to pursue his own, unknown, interests.

The Jade Palace sprawls in the Tempest, composed of thousands of separate buildings and courtyards. The Emperor himself maintains 251 separate palaces within the complex, and constantly moves from palace to palace by means of secret passages known only to him. He gives no warning or reason as to these moves. His advisors suspect it is out of fear of an assassination attempt, or possibly just to annoy them. No matter the cause, the result is that the members of the Imperial Court are constantly trying to keep track of where the Emperor is. Each Branch of government and faction at court tries to keep that location to themselves and misdirect others, thus protecting their access to the Emperor's ear. This occasionally provokes fisticuffs, or worse.

Each of the Four Magistrates has extensive quarters within the Palace. From here they direct the policies and actions of the lower officials. The Judge of the Dead maintains a court where he makes decisions on the most important cases in the realm. He is also responsible for keeping records of all the laws and regulations that the Emperor hands down. The current Judge, Li Gao, ascended to his position over 300 years ago by convincing the Emperor that the previous Judge was sympathetic to rebels in the Conquered Territories. He has held onto his position ever since by keeping closest of all the Magistrates to the ear of the Emperor. Notoriously harsh in his policies and sentences, he tolerates no laxity or softness among the Judges, and removes quickly those whom he sees as unfit.

The Protector of the Prosperous Realm maintains a large section of the Palace for the purposes of finding and sorting information. Reports from Protectors all over the Empire detail findings from *kuei* harvest figures to blackmail material, and the most important of these dispatches are seen by the Protector himself. The current Protector has held the position longer than any other magistrate in the kingdom. Since the fifth century, Fan Wushang has served the Emperor loyally and efficiently. Unlike most other members of the Imperial Court, Fan keeps as much distance between himself and the Emperor

as possible. Fan is a patient man who knows well the virtues of waiting and gathering information. He has survived many attempts to unseat him, always by virtue of superior information. Fan allows his Protectors relative freedom in their duties, as long as they report everything to their superiors. He reserves his wrath solely for those who hold back information.

It is in her offices in the Palace that the Jade Censor keeps track of all the souls and relics that come under Imperial Authority. Large numbers of Eunuchs and lesser Censors are employed in the processing of all this material as well as keeping the official register of families. All this is done under the auspices of Hu Ji, a powerful woman whose mortal identity is unknown. The Jade Censor for less than a century, she possesses greater personal wealth in relics and souls than anyone save the Emperor himself. She rose quickly through the ranks of the Censorship, taking over the top magistracy when her predecessor abruptly retired. Hu Ji's tremendous wealth allows her a great deal of freedom from the pressures of courtiers from the great families. Nevertheless, she is cautious, as she is not sure the Emperor trusts her. She works hard to gain his respect, and often competes with Li Gao for the Emperor's ear.

Peng Xin, the Commander of all the Armies, also retains quarters in the Palace. Here he plots strategy with his generals, and arranges the disposition of troops throughout the Emperor's domain. However, the Commander has no authority over members of the Immortal Guard, who have their own section of the Palace and act as the Emperor's personal bodyguards. The Commander of the Empire's military forces, Peng Xin is a hero of the wars with Stygia. He is renowned for his skill in battle, but has little influence at court. Desperately trying to maintain order within the armed forces, he is beset by the plots of a number of lesser generals with designs on his post. Only an alliance with the Immortal Guard keeps Peng Xin in power.

The Emperor also has at his disposal a number of personal advisors. The Emperor especially likes to have those who are familiar with the more arcane aspects of the afterlife close at hand, and mystics and fortune-tellers abound in the Imperial Palace, offering predictions to any who will pay them. This is a risky occupation, as an inaccurate prediction or inauspicious reading is likely to provoke the Emperor's anger. A few individuals with the knack of auguring good news have managed to insinuate themselves into the Emperor's inner circle over the centuries, and are among the few who can regularly find the Emperor's position. They will happily arrange an audience with Qin Shihuang, for the right price.

Wraiths are constantly journeying to the Palace, seeking some sort of favor or dispensation from the Emperor. Some of the larger families even keep permanent courtiers housed in the Palace. Scores of secretaries and servants serve the Emperor, making and breaking appointments seemingly at their own whim, and anyone wishing to see the Emperor must be prepared to bribe, flatter and cajole a host of lesser magistrates.

Since these audiences seldom actually happen, perseverance is necessary in pursuit of the Emperor. Often it is wiser to try a less direct route, such through one of the Emperor's many courtesans. There is much to be gained or lost from a successful audience. The Emperor cares little for mundane events, and can be very generous with awards and dispensations if the petitioner amuses him. However, if one makes even the slightest mistake in court etiquette, disaster follows.

## The Jade Censors



As in Stygia or any other land of the dead, souls are the driving force behind the economy and society of the Jade Kingdom. Control of souls, no matter what their form, is the only sure measure of power and influence in the Shadowlands. The constant struggle among wraiths for the control of this only resource led the Emperor to create the Jade Censors. The Censors are the magistrates charged with ensuring that new wraiths are reaped and treated in an appropriate manner; they decide all matters having to do with the ownership of souls, Artifacts and relics. Additionally they are responsible for cataloging every soul which enters the Jade Kingdom.

The Emperor has guaranteed every family the right to reap the souls of their own kin. However, this guarantee is not easily fulfilled, for it is often difficult to determine exactly what family has the right to an individual soul. Centuries of law and tradition have grown up around the claiming of souls as family members. Often these laws conflict on specific issues, leaving a great deal open to debate. For example, a woman is considered a member of the family into which she marries, and her in-laws would have the right to claim her soul. However, if her birth family can show that the in-laws have not shown proper respect for the departed soul, then they may make a claim to take the soul into their family. Similar conflicts constantly arise, and it is the responsibility of the Censors to make the final decision.

In general, the local Censor makes her decision before the newly dead soul's Caul is removed. Before a family can legally remove the Caul of a relative, the new wraith must be registered with the Censor. There then follows a period of one month during which the new wraith is provisionally a member of the reaping family. During that time, the Censor hears other claims upon the soul. If the matter becomes too heated, the Censor may take the soul under her temporary protection. The competing families then put forward their various claims, based on their interpretation of the laws and proof of lineage. After the Censor has resolved all claims, the wraith becomes a full member of the victorious family and now has the full rights and responsibilities of a citizen. At the village level, these proceedings are usually relatively informal. There is seldom much argument about





which family a wraith belongs to. The only real exceptions to this rule are those wraiths who promise to be very powerful. In the towns, struggles are more common, as there are more families to vie for influence, while at the city level, the conflicts can become very involved. Cases have been known to last for years, as each family strives to produce more evidence that an individual actually belongs to them.

Every relic that is brought into the Jade Kingdom must be registered with a Censor and is subject to taxation. The Censors appraise the value of the relic, and assess an appropriate fee for licensing the object. The Censor then imprints the relic with a seal which serves as proof that the item has been properly registered. The tax on relics usually amounts to about five percent of the value of the item, as determined by a Censor. This tax can be paid in relics or jade. If a wraith cannot pay the tax, then the relic in question is confiscated, and the wraith has one month to come up with the appropriate sum. At the end of the time period, the relic becomes the property of the state. Many Censors are willing to forgo the entire tax in favor of a personal donation or as a favor for friends and family. There is also a booming black market in false seals. These are especially useful for those who have very valuable relics such as guns or jade; the tax on such items can easily bankrupt a family.

Not every wraith is claimed by a family, nor does every wraith wish to be claimed, and it is up to the Jade Censors to determine their fate. If a wraith does not join an established family, then he has no claim to citizenship or protection under the law. He must appeal to a Censor, or risk being swept up as raw materials. The Censor decides whether or not the hopeful wraith has a legitimate claim to citizenship, based upon his living heritage. Traditionally, anyone of Chinese ancestry is eligible, but there are scores of minorities living within the territory of the Jade Kingdom. Some of these minorities have received official recognition, while others, such as the Japanese and Europeans, are forbidden from ever attaining citizenship. The Censors may order that a questionable soul be sold into slavery, impressed into the service of the Emperor or even sent to Feng-tu. Alternately, the Censor may enroll new wraiths onto the citizenship lists, allowing them to form their own families. The ultimate fate of a wraith often depends on their ability to influence the Censor through promises and favors, and few have sufficient luck or wealth to do this.

In times of war or natural disaster in the living world, the Censors are at their busiest. Teams are assigned to follow campaigning armies and gather the souls of the newly dead. Censors often employ additional labor to help them collect the souls in holding areas until they can be properly processed. These reaping teams are usually accompanied by Militia contingents for protection from *kuei* or soul poachers. After questioning the new arrivals, the Censor sends them to their respective homes to see if any wraith family has a claim on them. Those souls not claimed by a family, or who claim no family themselves, become property of the Emperor. Additionally, the souls of foreigners are immediately sent to Feng-tu for appropriate processing.

## Sample Censor Statistics

**Jade Censor:** City/District Level

**Nature:** Curmudgeon

**Demeanor:** Traditionalist

**Physical:** Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

**Social:** Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 2

**Talents:** Alertness 4, Brawl 2, Intimidation 5, Streetwise 2

**Skills:** Etiquette 3, Leadership 3, Melee 3, Stealth 2

**Knowledges:** Bureaucracy 4, Investigation 2, Law 2, Linguistics 2, Politics 3

**Backgrounds:** Allies 2, Contacts 3, Living Family 3, Status 4, Wealth 5, Wraith Family 4

**Passions:** Serve Emperor (Faith) 2, Serve Family (Love) 3, Hoard Wealth (Greed) 5

**Arcanoi:** Lifeweb 5, Way of the Artisan 5, Way of the Farmer 4, Way of the Merchant 4, Way of the Soul 3

**Corpus:** 6

**Willpower:** 7

**Pathos:** 9

Jade Censors are the tax collectors of the Jade Kingdom, although they are not limited to April 15 to extend their greedy hands. Censors keep very careful records of all comings and goings in their territory, making sure that all relics have an inspection stamp and that all wraiths have registered. Often both greedy and bored, Censors can be bribed into letting relics or even wraiths go unregistered. If they happen to come across a relic that really strikes their fancy, they often demand such a high tax that it is easier to give over the item than pay for it. They are always polite, but are capable of asking thousands and thousands of very polite questions while deciding a matter or waiting for a bribe to be offered. Censors do not like to be rushed, and will take their own sweet time, carefully recording everything with their Eunuchs.

## Judges of The Dead



Within the Jade Kingdom, wraith families constantly strive to better their position, often at the expense of others. The complex legal system that the Emperor has imposed attempts to control this competition and prevent disorder in the realm. The ostensible duty of the Judges is to enforce the laws fairly and see that justice is done. In truth, the Emperor cares little for justice, desiring only an orderly and obedient realm. Judges have a great deal of latitude as long as they keep their jurisdiction under control. If too many



families feel the need to take the law into their own hands, the Imperial Court takes this as a sign of incompetence in the local Judiciary. If the local population shows proper respect and deference to the Judge, then he is doing his job well. Getting good results is more important than following the ever-changing letter of the law.

The Judges are the sole source of law enforcement in the kingdom. While the Militia and Military may at times act to restore order, the Judges are the only ones to whom citizens can actively appeal. A Judge makes decisions after hearing from all involved parties and carrying out her own investigation, or in criminal cases, making a full investigation with the help of her staff. Judges serve as judge, jury and prosecutor, and occasionally executioner as well. There is not even a police force for a Judge to fall back upon, though occasionally the Military may serve in such a capacity. In most cases, it is entirely up to the Judge to investigate crimes and make arrests. This conflation of responsibilities into one office ensures swift justice, something the Emperor desires above all.

In cities, there is a Chief Judge with a number of assistants. The assistants have full Judicial authority, but may always be overridden by the Chief Judge. At the commandery level, the judges seldom hear cases unless something interests them. Often they pursue criminals who flee from one district to another.

Commandery Judges tour their territories much as the Emperor used to, ensuring that the lower courts have matters well in hand. They have the power to overrule any decision made by a lower court; this includes finding someone guilty whom a lower court had acquitted. They can also decrease and increase punishments. The provincial Judges are some of the most powerful figures in society, for they can overrule the decision of any court. Without even making an investigation, a provincial Judge can commute or extend sentences, even condemning whole villages to Hell if he deems it necessary. Provincial Judges also have significant administrative responsibilities, passing on new Imperial Laws to the populace via Eunuchs. Additionally, they also oversee the movement of condemned prisoners from retention centers to Feng-tu.

Judges hear two kinds of cases: civil and criminal. Civil cases are any brought by a citizen, and citizens may lodge complaints in civil court for any number of offenses from breach of contract to theft and murder. The distinctive factor that marks a case as civil is that a private citizen is seeking damages from another. For example, if a wraith is attacked by another, the family of the attacked may bring the attacker before a Judge. It is the onus of the family to prove that a crime was committed and that the accused is guilty. The family may ask for specific reparations, but the outcome is entirely at the discretion of the Judge. Criminal

cases are crimes against the state which the Judge undertakes to investigate himself. Crimes against the state include: treasonous plotting, the use of forbidden Arcanoi, stealing or damaging Imperial Property, lying to a magistrate and disobeying an order given by a member of the Immortal Guard (to name but a few). There are literally tens of thousands of crimes that can be committed, and should a Judge need an excuse to punish a wraith, it is rarely difficult to find one.

Judges have wide discretion when it comes to handing down decisions. Over the centuries, the Imperial Court has created a tremendous range of fines and punishments for every conceivable crime. Few Judges are actually familiar with most of these statutes, but the tremendous corpus of law almost guarantees that anything the Judge orders falls within the bounds of some statute. In civil cases, the Judge often imposes a fine of some sort. This can either take the form of hard currency or payment in relic goods. Alternately, the Judge might impose a period of forced servitude under the control of the plaintiff. In criminal cases, the Judge can also impose a fine, which the Judge herself typically collects (although the other magistrates may claim a portion). For more severe crimes, the Judge imprisons the offending wraith and confiscates his property. Imprisoned wraiths undertake forced labor projects under the auspices of the magistrates. For the most heinous of crimes (a distinction

made by the Judge), the criminal is sentenced to Feng-tu for final judgment and punishment. This is the last that is heard of the matter, for once a wraith enters the Dread Mountain, only the Emperor can save him.

There is an appeal process within the system. If a plaintiff is unhappy with the local Judge's opinion, he may take his case to that Judge's superior. Unless the wraith is in a city, this often involves a significant journey to the town or district Judge. Even after such a journey is made, there is no assurance that the Judge will hear one's case. It is often advisable to bring appropriate gifts in order to ease the course of justice. Appeals rarely succeed on their own merits. Instead it is necessary to have favors owed or even family members within the ranks of the Judges. In some regions, families have managed to build a monopoly of judicial authority. This makes the family members nearly immune from prosecution, while giving them powerful influence to trade for favors from other families.

## Sample Judge Statistics

**Judge of the Dead: City/District Level**

**Nature:** Conniver

**Demeanor:** Judge

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2



**Social:** Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2  
**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4  
**Talents:** Alertness 3, Expression 2, Intimidation 3, Subterfuge 3  
**Skills:** Etiquette 4, Performance 2  
**Knowledges:** Bureaucracy 4, Investigation 3, Law 4, Linguistics 2, Politics 3  
**Backgrounds:** Allies 2, Contacts 3, Living Family 4, Status 4, Wealth 4, Wraith Family 3  
**Passions:** Serve Emperor (Loyalty) 1, Serve Family (Duty) 4, Obtain Power (Greed) 3  
**Arcanoi:** Fatalism 3, Lifeweb 2, Puppetry 4, Way of the Farmer 2, Way of the Merchant 1, Way of the Scholar 4, Way of the Soul 2  
**Corpus:** 7  
**Willpower:** 6  
**Pathos:** 8

A typical Judge, particularly at this rarefied level, cares more about increasing his own wealth and prestige than the law. Judges usually possess a network of contacts throughout the region they control, and may call upon any number of old favors to assist them in their time of need. A Judge will pursue a reported crime as long as he has no reason not to (such as a well-timed bribe), and will be ruthless in his pursuit of criminals (unless he has a reason not to be diligent). Citizens of the Jade Kingdom have great respect for their Judges, and will try to avoid attracting their attention. Judges surround themselves with an air of dignity, always speaking very formally and respectfully while making their points by insinuation. Direct accusations are considered rude, and Judges prefer to give criminals the opportunity to confess their crime before they are officially charged. Nevertheless, Judges can be harsh when necessary, and frequently use torture to get what they want.

# The Protectorate of the Prosperous Realm

A good soldier is not violent.  
A good fighter is not angry.  
A good winner is not vengeful.  
A good employer is humble.  
This is known as the Virtue of not striving.  
This is known as ability to deal with people.  
This since ancient times has been known as the ultimate unity with heaven.

— Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*

**W**hen the Emperor had established himself as sole ruler of the known world of the dead, he knew that there were many who resented his presence. Even as the Emperor established his new Kingdom, his mortal legacy was being overthrown by a rebellion, and he needed to make sure that the same fate would not befall him. His armies having quashed any immediate threat, the Emperor established the Protectorate of the Prosperous Realm to ensure against future insurrections. He charged the Protectorate with the task of seeking out seditious acts among the populace and within the government itself, granting wide discretion as to how to accomplish these goals.

The modern Protectors are a well-established part of society, with magistrates at every level of society. Imperial Proclamations characterize the Protectors as “watchdogs of the common good,” whose duty it is to ensure that every citizen is free to pursue their own path toward enlightenment. Following a given path must not in any way threaten other citizens by disobeying any of the Emperor’s laws or in any way undermining the stability of the Kingdom. Death is a burden for everyone, and without the justice and order that the Emperor provides, existence would become unbearable. The Protectorate serves society by constantly being on guard against threats to universal harmony and prosperity, and because of their important duties, it is only appropriate that they be extended every courtesy by the citizenry.

What this all means is that the Protectorate has the express right to go anywhere in the Kingdom, regardless of whose property it may be. Nowhere is forbidden to the Protectors, and every citizen is obligated to give them aid when they request it. Furthermore, it is strictly forbidden to withhold information from a Protector, or to lie to anyone in the service of the Protectorate. The Protectors are the eyes and ears of the Emperor, and to disobey them is to disobey Qin Shihuang himself. But the power of the Protectors is not unlimited. They have no power to enforce their decisions, they can only make recommendations, and they can neither impose fines or sentences of any kind, nor interfere with the legal rights of citizens.

When a Protector does uncover an act of treason or some other crime, he must present his evidence to a Judge, Censor or Military commander. In the case of crimes, the Judge will then hold a trial and sentence the accused. In such cases, the word of a Protector is considered irrefutable, and the Judge usually follows his recommendations. If the Protector should come across unregistered souls or relics, she reports the offenders to a Censor who then takes appropriate steps to rectify the situation. These crimes pale in comparison to sedition and armed revolt. Should a Protector uncover such a plot, he immediately calls in the Militia, or



even the Guard to take swift action. There is seldom any trial; the offenders are captured or destroyed on the findings of the Protector alone.

Although the Emperor graciously allows the pursuit of individual religious freedom, certain activities are considered threatening or disruptive to the welfare of the state. For centuries, Buddhism has been the most popular religion among the Chinese, and the Emperor does allow the practice of Buddhist beliefs at a personal level. Active proselytizing is illegal, since, according to the Emperor, it disrupts civic peace and insults the beliefs of others. Furthermore, it is strictly forbidden to in any way imply that the Emperor is not Lord of all souls and the master of their fates; to deny his divine nature is an act of high treason. Furthermore, no one may instigate any sort of pilgrimage outside of the Jade Kingdom. This law is intended to keep any members of the population from attempting to journey to P'eng Lai *en masse*. Technically, individuals are encouraged to seek their personal enlightenment, but even individuals are discouraged from leaving the Emperor's realm. It is the duty of the Protectors of the Prosperous Realm to ensure that these laws are not violated, and much of their time is spent keeping a careful watch on religious leaders.

Surprise searches of Haunts and random inspection are commonplace in many parts of the Jade Kingdom, particularly in large Necropoli. In the villages and rural areas, the Protectors are often less formal or antagonistic. With rather low population concentrations, it is hard to keep a secret in these areas, and a Protector does not have to work hard to discover what is going on. The cities are more problematic, and city-level Protectors often employ many wraiths as informants and investigators. At the commandery level, Protectors are responsible for tracing large trends in rebel activity, as well as watching their subordinates to make sure they are doing their jobs within the law. Provincial Protectors organize some of the more intricate operations of the Protectorate, such as long-term infiltration of suspected groups and families.

On the surface, the Protectorate seems to possess the most power of all the magistrates, but they are severely limited in several ways, the most obvious of which is their reliance on others to enforce their decisions. However, there is a more subtle factor that every Protector must take into account. By the very nature of their activities (spying, informing and looking into other people's affairs), they alienate themselves from society. A successful Protector is never indiscriminate with her powers, but instead she keeps a low profile. Her work will be much easier if she has the help of friends instead of having to rely on coercing aid from the unwilling. Protectors who bully others about and flaunt their power seldom last, while those who show themselves to be the friend of the community are often forgiven when they have to be harsh.

## Sample Protector Statistics

### Protector of the Prosperous Realm: City/District Level

**Nature:** Critic

**Demeanor:** Caregiver

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

**Social:** Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3

**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Talents:** Alertness 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Expression 2, Intimidation 4

**Skills:** Etiquette 2, Stealth 3

**Knowledges:** Bureaucracy 4, Investigation 4, Law 2, Linguistics 3, Politics 4

**Backgrounds:** Contacts 5, Living Family 3 Status 2, Wealth 3, Wraith Family 2

**Passions:** Protect the Empire (Duty) 2, Serve Family (Love) 4, Destroy Rival Family (Anger) 3

**Arcanoi:** Argos 2, Embody 3, Fatalism 1, Moliate 2, Puppetry 4, Way of the Scholar 3, Way of the Soul 1

**Corpus:** 6

**Willpower:** 7

**Pathos:** 5

Protectors try to be everyone's friend, a ruse that fools few but with which all play along. Through a net of contacts, spies and informants, a Protector keeps an eye on things throughout her district. Protectors are often genial and friendly when you first meet them, as they are always looking for a potential informant. It is often astoundingly easy to bribe a Protector, for who's to say whether she's doing a good job but another Protector? Of course, she's just as likely to take another bribe and come after you anyway. Protectors are often very informal in their speech and mannerisms, although they always show proper respect when they think someone is watching.

## The Military



in Shihuang's power is based upon his ability to apply overwhelming force anywhere in the Jade Kingdom and its territories. The hammer with which the Emperor applies this force is the Imperial Army. At the base level, this consists of local conscripted militia. By Imperial Law, any

subject regardless of gender or age is liable for military service at any time. This gives Yu Huang access to potentially millions of soldiers at a moment's notice. There are professional soldiers as well, and many families encourage their younger wraiths to take this path to power. Above them all are the Immortal Guard, untouchable and inhuman.



Local Commanders are responsible for overseeing military training. Detailed laws dictate training procedures and the required readiness levels for the district. Since most weapons are prohibited among the citizenry, the Commander also oversees the local armory, issuing weapons when a unit is called up to service. By law, military exercises are to be conducted monthly, but in reality, these laws are rarely followed. Most citizens have better things to do with their time, especially the local commanders. Typically, Militia heads allow local families to buy off their service duty by paying an annual fee, technically legal if the family can show some sort of hardship. Many Commanders are rather lenient in their definition of hardship.

The professional regiments are made up of volunteers who generally serve for a few years. Many soldiers who die in the field end up serving in Qin Shihuang's army. If they never received the proper rites and honors from their family, these wraiths often end up serving out their entire existence in military service. Others enlist on the behalf of their families. Serving in the army bestows honor upon the entire family, and is an important step toward achieving prominence at court. Only soldiers may carry weapons, and it is often useful to have armed family members. Additionally, many soldiers serve in the Conquered Territories, providing the opportunity to collect souls and relics for the family's use. This is particularly helpful in families where the living relatives have fallen on hard times and cannot offer much support.

## Sample Militia Statistics

### Militia Commander

**Nature:** Conformist

**Demeanor:** Bravo

**Physical:** Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

**Social:** Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

**Mental:** Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

**Talents:** Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Dodge 3, Expression 2, Intimidation 4, Martial Arts (any style) 4

**Skills:** Etiquette 2, Leadership 4, Melee 4, Stealth 2,

**Knowledges:** Bureaucracy 2, Linguistics 2, Politics 2

**Backgrounds:** Allies 4, Contacts 2, Living Family 2, Status 3, Wealth 2, Wraith Family 2

**Passions:** Protect Empire (Loyalty) 4, Serve Family (Love) 2, Destroy Rebels (Hate) 3

**Arcanoi:** Argos 2, Fatalism 2, Moliate 3, Pandemonium 3, Way of the Merchant 2, Way of the Soul 3

**Corpus:** 9

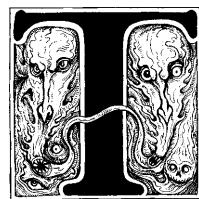
**Willpower:** 6

**Pathos:** 5

Local Militia Commanders are charged with protecting the Jade Kingdom from roving bands of *kuei* and rebel insurrections. They are professional warriors who command part-time soldiers. Their view is that they are infinitely superior to those under their command, as well as other magistrates. "Pencil-

pushing gutless leeches" is generally the nicest thing one will hear said about a Censor or Protector in a barracks. Nevertheless, it's the Militia's duty to protect them all, and the Military's dedication to duty is legendary. Of all the magistrates, they are by far the most difficult to bribe. Militia Commanders are haughty individuals, treating others with minimal respect unless they've seen combat. They are also rabidly xenophobic, and when it comes to the Conquered Territories or Stygia, they operate on a "stab first, ask questions later" basis.

## The Immortal Guard



he Guard is the single most powerful institution in the Empire. Even though many in the Yellow Springs never behold a Guardsman, their influence is felt everywhere. They are the fist of the Emperor, the only figures in the Empire whom he entirely trusts. Because if this, they stand outside of the complex laws of Yu Huang, free to do as they please. Every subject is obligated to bow before their will, no matter what her rank may be. The Guard may even summarily enslave or destroy any subject if they feel it is necessary. The citizenry of the Jade Empire almost universally fear and respect the Guard, even those who resent their very existence.

The Guard maintains the power of the Emperor through reputation, not action, as they have no wish to terrify the populace indiscriminately. Indeed, the popular image of a Guardsman is that of a spirit of justice. In a society of complex and oft broken laws, the Guard remains uncorrupted and immutable. When a contingent passes through an area, most wraiths feel a twinge of fear. Few are free of all guilt, and the possibility exists that the Guard has come just to punish them. In fact, the Guard seldom interferes in local affairs, but the tales of their harsh justice are known throughout the kingdom. The strength of these tales alone keeps many provinces in line.

Only in the persecution of rebellion does the Guard use its full power. Qin Shihuang's greatest fear is being overthrown by his own subjects, and the Guard reacts quickly and fiercely to the slightest sign of rebellion. Entire families may be eliminated if one member is declared a traitor, and the Guard is quick to send any possible rebels to Hell for interrogation.

A large portion of the Guard is stationed in the Conquered Territories in order to suppress revolt. Here the subjects view the Guard as spirits of death, not justice. While they may rule by reputation in the Chinese Shadowlands, this is not so abroad. Guardsmen routinely roust conquered subjects at random, torturing or destroying them in order to instill submission and fear. They have become the most hated symbol of Imperial Rule, and are often the first object of attack in any uprising. As they are also the most potent aspect of Imperial Rule, any assault on the Guard generally ends the rebellion.



The striking appearance of the Guard makes their presence unmistakable. Their skin is solid, resembling the terra cotta of their original forms. However, the substance is now hard as rock, resistant to most weapons. Despite their hard exterior, they are still quite flexible, capable of the full range of human movements and expressions. Their lips move as they speak, and their eyes fix upon their adversaries. Although these movements mimic human motion perfectly, most onlookers find them disconcerting. The Guardsmen are at once immovable and fluid, the perfect balance of action and inaction. Even more eerie is their coloration. In the land of the dead, color is drained from everything; the world is pale gray. In this panorama of drabness, the Guard radiate powerful, bright colors, the effect of which is invariably disturbing. These are not the colors of the living world, but a twisted distortion of them. Rather than reminding one of the living world, the glowing reds and oranges upon a Guardsman's skin assures one that these are unnatural creations.

The Guard is divided up into three regiments, each originally 6000 strong. The current number of Guardsmen is a secret known only to the Emperor. It is certain that many have fallen over the centuries, and there is no known method of replacing them. Likewise, the Jade Kingdom has grown in recent centuries, spreading the Guard's resources even thinner. Their presence is particularly important in the Conquered Territories, where revolt is a constant threat. Nevertheless, the Guard still seems to be omnipresent. Seldom do large units gather, but squadrons or platoons of the Guard always seem ready to meet the threat of armed revolt or foreign invasion. Often the presence of just a few is enough to turn the tide of battle.

When Fu Xia created the Guard, sacrificing thousands of Qin Shihuang's best soldiers, he retained their original military organization from their time as living soldiers. Each soldier is locked in his original rank, for there is no advancement within the Guard, save through the destruction of a superior. Although the Guard are all formidable warriors, it is hard for them to learn and develop their skills. The higher ranked officers are more likely to have high Arcanoi ratings, while the average foot soldier has proficiency in only one or two Arcanoi. There are a variety of troops within a regiment, with different kinds of armaments and functions. The vast majority of Guardsmen are simple infantry, armed with halberds and swords. Attached to each regiment is a large contingent of archers, most with long bows, but some wielding crossbows. Each regiment also contains a substantial wing of cavalry, half of which are mounted on terra-cotta horses, the other half riding in chariots. Officers also ride in chariots, accompanied by a contingent of the most experienced warriors.

The Guard are fearsome foes in combat, nearly unbeatable by normal means. In life they were the best of Yu Huang's soldiers; in death they constantly train for and fight the Emperor's wars. The Emperor equips them with the most powerful weapons, jade swords and spears effective against every type of wraith and Spectre. The Guard are also adept at the tactical use of Arcanoi. They use Argos to gain position, and are masters of using Leap of Rage to devastating effect. They have also developed their own version of Moliate, specific to their special

flesh. The Moliate arts of other wraiths are ineffective against the stonelike skins of the Guard, but Guardsmen may affect both normal wraiths and themselves.

## The Guard and Pathos

Guardsmen do not rely on the living for Pathos, and cannot gain Pathos in this way. Instead they replenish themselves by feasting on souls. A single soul will usually give a Guardsman enough Pathos for several years, but still the Guard's appetite puts a tremendous dent in the Imperial coffers.

Few outside the palace know of the Guard's taste. Fewer still know that Guardsmen cannot actually consume the souls themselves, but must have the souls fed to them. The ritual of feeding can only be performed at the Necropolis at Xi'an by the Emperor himself, and the only known example of a Guardsman feeding outside of Xi'an was during the Third Great Revolt (see **Chapter 2: History**). A single soul translates into several hundred Pathos for the Guard, although this Pathos is for the Guard's use alone and cannot be tapped, even via Usury, for another.

## Sample Guard Statistics

### Footsoldier/Archer

**Nature:** Conformist

**Demeanor:** Conformist

**Physical:** Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

**Social:** Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Talents:** Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Martial Arts: Shuai-Chiao (soft) 3

**Skills:** Archery 4, Melee 4, Stealth 3

**Knowledges:** Etiquette 2, Investigation 2, Law 3

**Arcanos:** Argos 2, Fatalism 2, Moliate 3, Chains of the Emperor 3

**Pathos:** 100 maximum

**Fetters:** Necropolis at Xi'an 5

**Willpower:** 7

**Corpus:** 12

**Armor Rating:** 5

**Weapons:** Jade spears, swords and bows, all of which cause aggravated damage

This type of soldier makes up the majority of the Immortal Guard, and groups of three to five can be found throughout the Jade Kingdom. They are universally loyal to Yu Huang and their Commanders, obeying any order even if it means their destruction. Demanding respect from all they meet, they do not tolerate anything less than a servile attitude from the average citizen. Even powerful magistrates are careful not to offend them. Guardsmen tend to be very laconic when dealing with other wraiths, but they can be surprisingly boisterous when no one but other Guardsmen are around. All of them carry at least one weapon of True Jade, although the arrows used by the archers do not have jade tips.

### Unit Commander

**Nature:** Bravo

**Demeanor:** Bravo

**Physical:** Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5

**Social:** Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

**Talents:** Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Intimidation 4, Martial Arts: Shuai-Chiao (soft) 4

**Skills:** Archery 4, Leadership 3, Melee 5, Stealth 2

**Knowledges:** Etiquette 3, Investigation 3, Law 3

**Arcanoi:** Argos 2, Fatalism 2, Moliate 4, Chains of the Emperor 4, Way of the Scholar 3

**Pathos:** 150 maximum

**Willpower:** 8

**Corpus:** 15

**Armor Rating:** 5

**Weapons:** Jade broadsword which causes aggravated damage

Commanders are in charge of 10 to 100 Guardsmen. They are responsible for issuing simple orders and keeping the unit ready for battle at any time, as well as preventing any trouble with the local population. They are intimidating and overbearing toward their troops, and carry their attitude over into dealings with wraiths outside the Guard. They shout, bully and threaten anyone who does not immediately obey their orders, and will gladly cut down any wraith who behaves less than deferentially.

### Regimental Commander

**Nature:** Architect

**Demeanor:** Architect

**Physical:** Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6

**Social:** Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2

**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

**Talents:** Alertness 5, Athletics 3, Intimidation 4, Martial Arts: Shuai-Chiao (soft) 5

**Skills:** Archery 4, Leadership 5, Melee 5, Stealth 2

**Knowledges:** Etiquette 4, Investigation 4, Law 4

**Arcanoi:** Argos 3, Fatalism 2, Moliate 5, Chains of the Emperor 5, Way of the Scholar 5

**Willpower:** 9

**Pathos:** 200 maximum

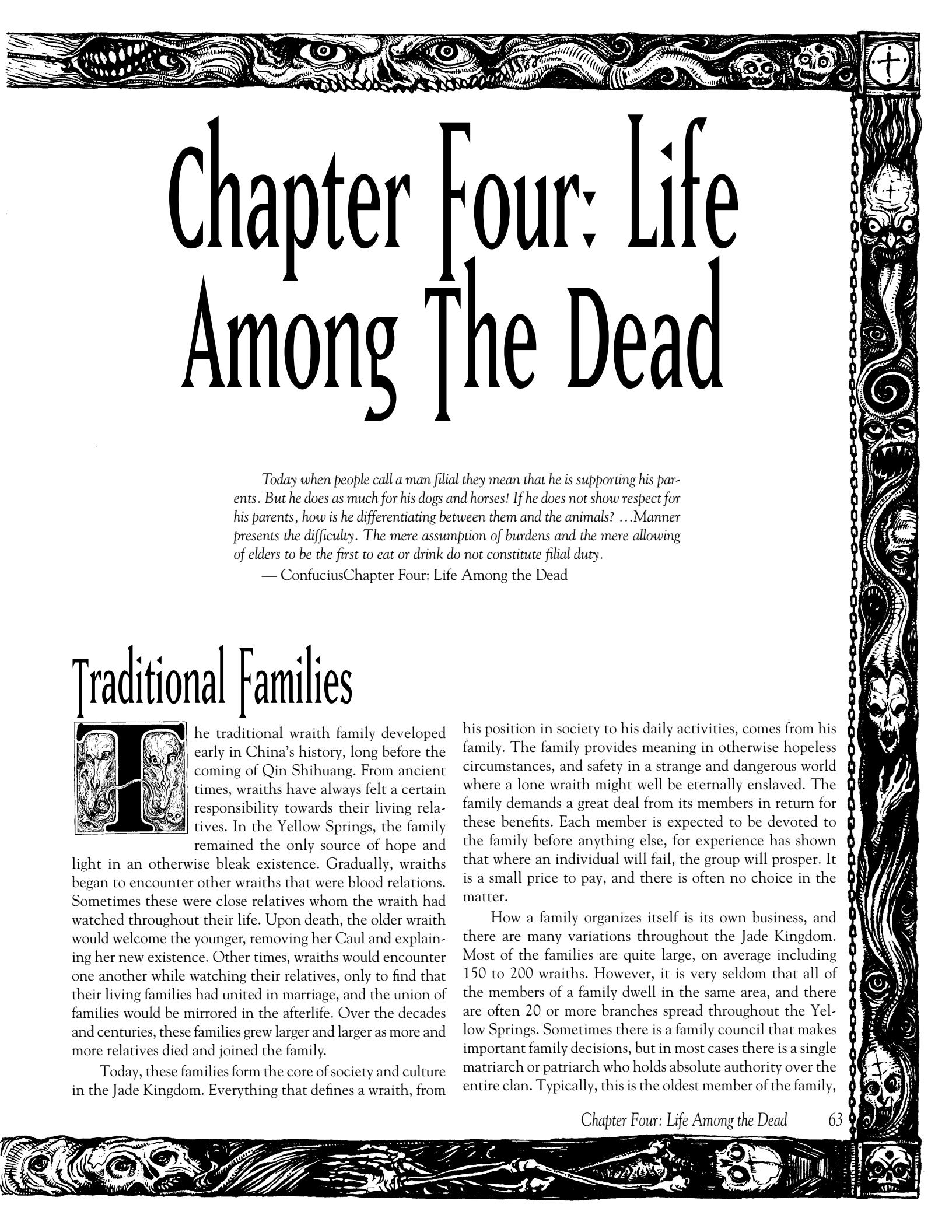
**Corpus:** 15

**Armor Rating:** 5

**Weapons:** Jade Weapons of all sorts, often with an Arcanos built in.

Commanders of a thousand or more Guardsmen, these are the Emperor's elite. There are only 18 Regional Commanders, each of whom travels with a personal staff of unit commander-level servants. When entering a province, they expect to be greeted by the Governor immediately, and to be obeyed unquestioningly thereafter. Regional Commanders do not even talk to most wraiths below commandery level, preferring to let their aides de camp do so for them.





# Chapter Four: Life Among The Dead

*Today when people call a man filial they mean that he is supporting his parents. But he does as much for his dogs and horses! If he does not show respect for his parents, how is he differentiating between them and the animals? ...Manner presents the difficulty. The mere assumption of burdens and the mere allowing of elders to be the first to eat or drink do not constitute filial duty.*

— Confucius Chapter Four: Life Among the Dead

## Traditional Families

**T**he traditional wraith family developed early in China's history, long before the coming of Qin Shihuang. From ancient times, wraiths have always felt a certain responsibility towards their living relatives. In the Yellow Springs, the family remained the only source of hope and light in an otherwise bleak existence. Gradually, wraiths began to encounter other wraiths that were blood relations. Sometimes these were close relatives whom the wraith had watched throughout their life. Upon death, the older wraith would welcome the younger, removing her Caul and explaining her new existence. Other times, wraiths would encounter one another while watching their relatives, only to find that their living families had united in marriage, and the union of families would be mirrored in the afterlife. Over the decades and centuries, these families grew larger and larger as more and more relatives died and joined the family.

Today, these families form the core of society and culture in the Jade Kingdom. Everything that defines a wraith, from

his position in society to his daily activities, comes from his family. The family provides meaning in otherwise hopeless circumstances, and safety in a strange and dangerous world where a lone wraith might well be eternally enslaved. The family demands a great deal from its members in return for these benefits. Each member is expected to be devoted to the family before anything else, for experience has shown that where an individual will fail, the group will prosper. It is a small price to pay, and there is often no choice in the matter.

How a family organizes itself is its own business, and there are many variations throughout the Jade Kingdom. Most of the families are quite large, on average including 150 to 200 wraiths. However, it is very seldom that all of the members of a family dwell in the same area, and there are often 20 or more branches spread throughout the Yellow Springs. Sometimes there is a family council that makes important family decisions, but in most cases there is a single matriarch or patriarch who holds absolute authority over the entire clan. Typically, this is the oldest member of the family,



since the elderly are considered to possess great knowledge and wisdom. Just how much control the family elder wields depends on how well respected they are, and how actively they choose to exercise their authority. While some families are run like corporations or military organizations, others are more relaxed, allowing their members more freedom in pursuing their own interests.

Ties between various branches of the family are kept up through regular meetings. These gatherings were often held during the Festival of the Hungry Ghosts, as this was an especially easy time to travel. In recent times, the celebration of this festival in mainland China has all but ceased, and it is certainly not the great occasion it once was. Nevertheless, many families continue to hold their meetings during the traditional dates of the festival out of respect. These gatherings can be anything from parties to war councils, and everything in between.

It is the individual branches of the family that continually influence and even control a wraith's daily existence. Each branch keeps a constant watch on all of the living relatives in their region, immediately laying claim to any who die and come to the Yellow Springs. The newly departed soul is brought before the senior family member in the region, who removes her Caul and welcomes her to the family. Over a period of several days, the new wraith gets to know her family while learning the intricacies of existence in the Jade Kingdom. In larger families, a new wraith is often given as long as a year to come to terms with her death before she is asked to take up familial duties. Smaller and poorer families may not be able to afford this luxury, and will immediately press the newcomer into service.

If a family does not keep actively involved in the political and social scene of their neighborhood, they are likely to decline quickly, so there is constantly work to be done. Nominally, the primary concern of any family is to look after their living relatives, and seek a way to P'eng Lai for those in the Yellow Springs. Realistically, few families believe in or care about the latter, while the former is often seen as a cumbersome, but necessary duty. The living provide valuable support with their worship and sacrifices, and when they die, they too strengthen the family. Obtaining new sources of family revenue and gaining influence in the Bureaucracy have more tangible benefits than some mythical paradise, for they keep the family strong.

The most successful families are case studies in the diversification of interests, as each family tries to avoid being dependent on outsiders. Each family tries to obtain magistracies in each of the Four Branches of Government, so that they will never be without influence should trouble arise. A few families take an opposite tack, preferring to specialize in one of the branches, and betting that their tremendous influence in one area can

buy them protection in other areas. This latter strategy often works very well in the short term, but is prone to backfire at the worst times. A family that has made too many enemies and is not well diversified may well find that the support of one branch cannot outweigh the enmity of the other three.

Diversification is not limited to the kinds of magistracies that the family seeks to hold, but also includes the abilities the family fosters among its members. After assessing a new family member's abilities, elders usually suggest what kinds of Arcanoi would be most useful. The new wraith then studies under the tutelage of a more experienced master. When no one within the family is skilled at a particular art, the wraith may be sent to another family for training, although this often costs a great deal in jade and favors. No family can afford to be without certain skills, particularly the Four Paths, which are essential to maintaining prosperity.

The holding of magistracies, proficiency in Arcanoi and care of the living relatives are all steps on the path to ensuring long-term stability. The final ingredient for a secure clan is a steady supply of resources, that is, souls and relics. Regular sacrifices from the living are helpful, but in many parts of China, the old traditional values have been abandoned in favor of new philosophies and religions such as Communism or Christianity. The only other reliable sources of income are harvesting *kuei*, accepting bribes and the Conquered Territories. Harvesting *kuei* is a dangerous practice that requires great skill at the Path of the Farmer, and even then, the return is ephemeral. It is commonplace for Judges and Protectors to accept bribes as a source of income, and Censors often levy excessive taxes and pocket the difference, while the Militia demands fees for protecting those under their authority. However, the Emperor frowns on dishonest magistrates, and by taking bribes one runs the risk of incurring the Imperial Displeasure. Holding an office in the Conquered Territories can provide a family with potentially tremendous profit, as long as the opportunity is used correctly. There is but small reimbursement from the government for service abroad, and most magistrates in this position prefer to take a portion of their quotas of enslaved wraiths for themselves.

A wraith need not be related by blood or marriage to join a family, and adoption is a common practice. Those who enter the Yellow Springs without any family claiming them soon find themselves at a disadvantage in society. They cannot gain any political power or social prestige, as the families have a lock on all the paths to power. Nor can they peacefully pursue their own interests, for without a family's protection, they are easily harassed or even enslaved. A wraith with valuable skills can shop around, offering her services to the family that makes the best offer. Less talented individuals often have to beg to be let into a family, and





are often treated as servants or slaves rather than family members, at least until they prove their worth. If the family chooses to adopt an outsider, they must get the permission of the local Censor, who must affirm that there are no other claims on the soul. There are often heated custody battles about new wraiths, as more than one family lays claim to a promising soul, and it is ultimately up to the Censor to decide which family retains the wraith.

A Stygian looking in on the family system from the outside might well think that the families are hypocritical tyrannies. Nothing could be further from the truth, or so most citizens of the Jade Kingdom would tell you. The family is the center of their universe, the beginning and end of their existence. The family will stand by you when everyone else runs for cover. If the family prospers, so will you. Only the unified force of the family has the power and influence to aid the living in their times of need. Without the family, everything would fall into chaos. Few in the Jade Kingdom envy the harsh realities of Stygia, where there seems to be nobody you can really trust and depend upon. If the family should ask that you serve in return for all the benefits they give you, that is their right and your duty as well.

While families may be the saviors of many individuals, giving them meaning and security, the families are also the single largest source of tension in the Jade Kingdom. Each clan jealously guards its own position against incursions by other families, all the while trying to expand their own power base. These conflicts rarely result open physical combat between rival clans, but there can be tremendous animosity. The courts are a favored battleground, especially when one family has a great deal of influence with one or more of the presiding magistrates. Typical lawsuits include alleging the unauthorized use of an Arcanos, interfering with one's living relatives, trespassing in the family Haunts, etc. Most large families have members, skilled in the twin legal arts of rhetoric and bribery, who serve as lawyers.

Although there may be a great deal of competition, there is also cooperation among families, especially when two households are not in direct competition for the same resources. These alliances are often merely of convenience, but there are times when two families find that they have so much in common that they will merge through a marriage. The marriage ceremony is usually just symbolic, and does not represent any union between two particular souls, but rather between the two families. The marriage is "consummated" by an exchange of gifts and an elaborate ceremony. After this, the two families will often work to formalize their union, by driving some of their living relatives together in matrimony. Such a union of the flesh will serve to fully bind the two clans together, and the dead often go to great lengths to bring it about.

## Communist Families

China has changed dramatically in the past century. The exhausting civil wars that raged across the land disrupted many families, and when Mao Zedong took power, there were even more drastic changes. As more and more members of the Communist Revolution died and came to the Yellow Springs, they became more unsatisfied with their position. Few families laid claim to these rebels, fearing that they would dishonor the family with their revolutionary ways. Most were left without any support or claim to citizenship, and at first many were sent to Feng-tu for processing.

Many of the former revolutionaries sought each other out in death, in an attempt to find some source of comfort and support in the strange and hostile realm of the dead. In desperation for some sort of legitimization, they began to form their own families, making up names and histories and bribing the Censors to legitimize them. In the dreary years after the Fourth Revolt, most families were somewhat impoverished, and for the right price the Censors were glad to bend the rules, even for such disreputable wraiths. Soon these Communist families were popping up in major cities, seeking magistracies for their members and making deals with the more traditional clans.

Today, the Communist families have become an established institution in the Jade Kingdom, even holding positions of significant power in some districts. Unlike traditional families, they do not limit themselves to blood relatives, but take anyone who is willing. Because of this openness, they attract a large number of those who would otherwise be left without a family or citizenship. This allows many who would never otherwise have a chance to seek magistracies and gain some authority within the Bureaucracy. The families tend to be very expansionist, actively recruiting new members, even from other families. In most regions, the traditional families have the necessary power in court to limit the expansion of the Communists, but in Beijing and other urban areas, this is rapidly changing.

Unlike the traditional families, the Communists run their families almost exclusively through a council of family members. This is by no means democratic, as only a few members are chosen to be in the council, but it is far easier to remove a council member than it is to remove the head of a traditional family. The council serves in much the same way as a traditional clan leader, assigning tasks to members and deciding what skills need to be learned to benefit the family as a whole. However, many families give their members the right to appeal important decisions. When the council acts outrageously, the family as a whole might be inclined to overrule their decision, but this does not happen often.



Whereas most wraiths in the Jade Kingdom congregate around their living relatives as sources of Pathos, the Communist families are more similar to Western wraiths in that they will take Pathos wherever they may find it. Most of the original Communists focused their attentions on their living comrades, relishing in their victories and the progression of the People's Republic. In modern times, the government has swung back towards the right, and fervent Communism is slowly dying. Many of the older wraiths are at a loss as to who to follow, and it is the youthful democracy movement that is the largest source of Pathos for the dead revolutionaries. Their fervor provides the Pathos that drives many of the Communist families, even though the two groups have little ideology in common.

Traditional families fear the Communists, more for their expanding power than for any ideological reasons. In response to the threat, many of the most prominent families have requested that the Emperor take some sort of action against these potentially revolutionary foes. Much to their chagrin, the Emperor has turned a deaf ear to these requests, preferring to let the Communists run their course. Yu Huang sees no threat in the Communists, and believes that much is to be gained by their presence. Because the Communists are working within the system the Emperor has established, he can easily keep an eye on them and control them as necessary. Whole divisions of the Protectorate have been secretly assigned to monitor and infiltrate the Communist families. Their acceptance of all comers makes them much easier to infiltrate than traditional families, who have the close bonds of blood relations keeping them loyal to one another. Yu Huang wants the traditional and Communist families to struggle against one another, for he sees the Communist families as an effective check against the more powerful traditional families. As long as the two sides are fighting among themselves, neither has the strength to challenge the Emperor.

Although many of the new families may share the nominal title of Communists, it must not be thought that they are all loyal to one another or to some common ideology. Most of the Communist dogma died with them, and now they are Maoist or Leninist in name only. Together they may stand against the "Tyranny of the Great Families," but they have their differences as well, as each seeks to secure their own position in society. In cities like Shanghai, where Communist families predominate, there is little difference between the families there and the families of more tradition-bound regions like Hong Kong. Behind the guise of ideological debates as to how to carry on the revolution, each family plots for its own advantage over the others. The most significant difference is that there is much more switching from family to family among the Communists than there is among traditionalists. Without the strong family ties developed through ancestor worship and other practices, there is little to ensure a wraith's loyalty.

# The Individual

Of course, the Chinese mix everything up. Look what we have to work with, huh: Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoist alchemy and sorcery. We take what we want and leave the rest. Just like your salad bar.

— Egg Shen, *Big Trouble in Little China*



eath is a very personal experience, to put matters mildly. The sudden transition from the world of the living to the Yellow Springs is a tremendous shock, but few in the Jade Kingdom have time to make the adjustment. Before they know what has happened, new wraiths are beset by family members, government officials and the other harsh realities of the afterlife. Many come to accept their new surroundings and try to find a place within the complex society of the Jade Kingdom, but there is always a nagging feeling that no matter how active their existence in the Yellow Springs may be, it is only a pale shadow of life. There are those who seek more out of death. Some seek the way to P'eng Lai, others reach for inner peace, and there are even some who embrace Oblivion.

There is little space for individual interests in the society of the dead. The family must come first if everyone is to prosper, but most try to find time for their own needs. The family may ostensibly help its members on the path to P'eng Lai, but few families have the time, resources or inclination to devote to such a lofty goal. The realities of daily existence are of more concern, and the individual who still retains some hope of finding Transcendence in whatever form is often regarded with scorn. Yet the hope still lingers in many, and they seek Transcendence when they can. Most will not give up their familial duties to seek the Blessed Isles, but still they hope that someday they can escape their grim existence.

There are those who are willing to take that fateful step, and break away from the family to find the way beyond the Yellow Springs and the Jade Kingdom. These are the monks, priests and scholars of the dead, who offer meaning and hope in place of Yu Huang's oppression and laws. There are temples established in various parts of the Yellow Springs, where pilgrims come to learn the secrets of the enlightened. Some of these teachers wander throughout the realm, revealing the path to freedom from death and damnation. The Emperor knows of these men and women, and some of them even have Imperial Sanction. They are allowed to preach what they like, as long as it in no way foments rebellious thoughts or attitudes. If they wish to find P'eng Lai, the Emperor welcomes it, as long as they pay their taxes and obey his laws, for Yu Huang knows that few will succeed, and that mystics and philosophers make peaceful subjects.





## The New Buddhism

The Jade Kingdom is not what anyone expects when they die, for it corresponds to no living concept of Heaven or Hell. It has been necessary for many of the teachings of the living to be reworked in order to accommodate the realities of death. The Buddhist teachers of the Yellow Springs consider that being a wraith is the highest incarnation of the soul before one reaches Nirvana. Death and the Yellow Springs are the final tests of the spirit, for it is the only reincarnation in which one remembers all of the events and knowledge from his past life. You have one last opportunity to learn from your mistakes and to capitalize upon whatever enlightenment you gained during life. Becoming a wraith means that the soul has fully transcended the body, and is now free of the cares and distractions of the flesh. All that remains is to prepare one's mind for the final journey to enlightenment.

This is the most common philosophy of enlightenment in the Jade Kingdom, and it is the only one that has official sanction from the Emperor. There are several different sects of this new Buddhism spread throughout China, but most of them have relatively similar teachings. They often join together to form temples or monasteries where others may come to learn and be enlightened. These usually take the form of Haunts located in temples and monasteries in the living world, one of the most famous of which is the Temple Haunt located concurrent to the graveyard of the Shaolin priests in the Songshan Mountains. This is the largest of the sanctioned temples, and here the student may learn from some of the greatest teachers in Chinese history.

Three are other, more radical philosophical and religious movements in the Jade Kingdom, but most of these are forced to keep a low profile. There are still remnants of the Buddhist sect that instigated the Second Great Revolt, who teach that the Emperor is a demon that must be destroyed if anyone is ever to achieve Nirvana. Other religions have representatives in the Yellow Springs as well, and several Heretic sects have found their way into the Jade Kingdom, carried both by missionaries and fortunate prisoners who have managed to escape. Taoist sages are known to wander the Yellow Springs, teaching their philosophy of non-action and oneness with death. They believe that it is only by fully coming to terms with one's state that you can then move past it to Transcendence. They see the family system and the Bureaucracy as unnecessary impediments to a fulfilling existence, and would have every wraith that seeks P'eng Lai abandon these institutions.

## The State Religion

There are no temples dedicated to Yu Huang, nor is there a priesthood devoted to serving his needs, but without a doubt, the Emperor is the center of what most citizens of the Jade Kingdom would consider their religion. In fact, most citizens of the Jade Kingdom do regard the Emperor as a divine being, and many assume that he can see and hear all that goes on in the Kingdom. While this may be an exaggeration, Yu Huang encourages these and any other beliefs that enhance his prestige. To some, he is an incarnation of the Buddha who holds sway over who may journey on to P'eng Lai, and only by faithfully serving him can one truly attain Paradise. In order to establish his legitimacy before others in the kingdom, Yu Huang capitalizes upon traditional Taoist beliefs concerning spirits, gods and demons. By taking the name Jade Emperor, he established himself at the head of the Taoist pantheon of deities, and there are many who believe that he is that most powerful of gods. The Emperor also encourages philosophies that help stabilize his kingdom, borrowing heavily from the hierarchical teachings of Confucius.

The five classical Confucian relationships have been conflated into just three in the Jade Kingdom, since relationships like father and son do not really apply to the dead. The first relationship is that between elder and younger family members: the younger should always respect their elders and obey their commands, while the elders should give the younger sound advice and good leadership. The second is the relationship between friend and friend. Each soul should be honest and respectful of another's family and property, and should in no way infringe upon their rights. It is considered the height of bad taste to interfere in another's affairs unless you are asked. The final relationship is that between ruler and subordinate. The subordinate is obligated to treat those in authority with respect and obedience. If a magistrate should require something of you, do not insult her by questioning her motives, but simply do as you are told. In return, it is the sworn duty of the magistrates to govern fairly and properly, and to see to it that all receive the protection and benefit of Imperial Law. This relationship also extends to the dynamic between higher and lower magistrates, all the way up to the Emperor. All give Yu Huang their obedience and respect, and in return he gives them a peaceful and prosperous afterlife. It is when the subordinates become greedy and disrespectful that the system falls apart and revolts ensue. This is an obvious and heinous affront to the Emperor, and one that he will punish with impunity.



# The Resistance



ot every wraith who is unsatisfied with his existence in the Jade Kingdom turns to religion for escape. There is a strong underground movement within the Yellow Springs to throw off the Emperor's chains and free the Chinese dead from oppression. At various times in the kingdom's history, these movements have launched armed uprisings, but have never succeeded in toppling the Jade Palace. For a time it was hoped that the great numbers of Chinese revolutionaries would greatly increase the numbers of the resistance movements. Unfortunately for them, the Emperor succeeded in integrating the Communists by allowing them to form their own families, so that now the Communist families are just as much a part of the system as the Bureaucracy.

The active resistance movements tend to hold fairly radical ideas as to how the realm of the dead should be ruled. The largest organized group is called the Struggle Against the Qin, or simply the Struggle, and they have members throughout the Yellow Springs and the Conquered Territories. They base their movement in the belief that Yu Huang has no legitimate claim to divinity and no mandate to rule over the dead. The Struggle focuses on the Emperor's earthly and mundane origins, preaching that he is just a man like any other, and yet he is a worse tyrant than any Emperor or warlord ever was in the living world. Why is this so? It is because the people willingly kowtow to him and play the game by his rules, serving in the Bureaucracy and registering in families with the Censors. The Struggle insists that death is punishment enough without the added burden of the rule of Qin Shihuang. Until he is overthrown, no soul will truly know peace.

Another powerful resistance movement is the Society of a Thousand Eyes and Hands, which seeks to overthrow the Emperor by more subtle means. Founded several hundred years ago, the Society has been slowly building its power, gaining control of more and more important magistracies. When the time is right, they hope to seize control of the entire government and wrest power from the Emperor. The Society would be much stronger today had it not been divided during the Fourth Great Revolt. Many in the Society felt that the Great Maelstrom was the perfect opportunity to make their move, while others felt that they should wait until they could find a way to neutralize the Immortal Guard. The former ignored the warnings of the latter and joined in the general revolt, with the result that most of them were found out and captured or destroyed. Now the influence of the Society has been cut in half, and it is still recovering from the blow. Nevertheless,

they have hope that some day they will be able to throw off the yoke of Imperial Rule.

Both of these societies, as well as innumerable lesser ones, are constantly on the lookout for new recruits. Those who favor open, armed struggle are more likely to be swept up by the Struggle, while those who seek a political solution to the problem of Yu Huang are more likely to serve the interests of the Thousand Eyes. The rebellious groups take their internal security very seriously, and have no compunctions about annihilating a wraith whom they feel is a traitor.

## Spirits of Healing



Instead of calling in a doctor to treat a child's case of measles, a peasant mother in China will attribute the complaint to the machinations of evil spirits, and will apply to her patron saint to assist her in their expulsion. Even if a doctor is summoned, he is quite likely to foster her belief and reinforce whatever treatment he prescribes by the administration of a charm, written on paper and burned, whose ashes are credited with effecting the cure.

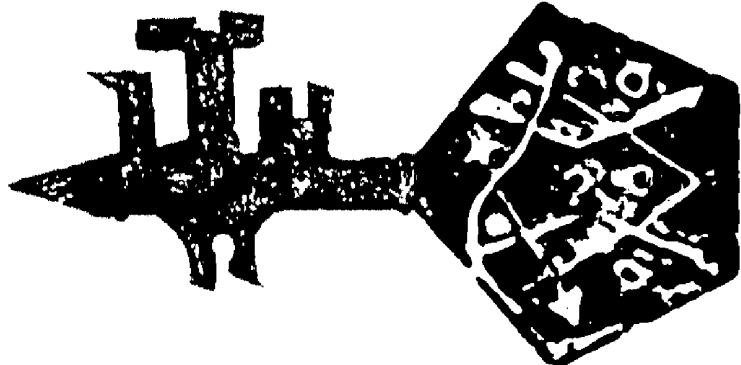
The connection of sickness with religion is so firmly established that even well-educated Chinese, about to undergo treatment by a Western-trained physician, will often submit themselves to a service conducted by a medium, with offers

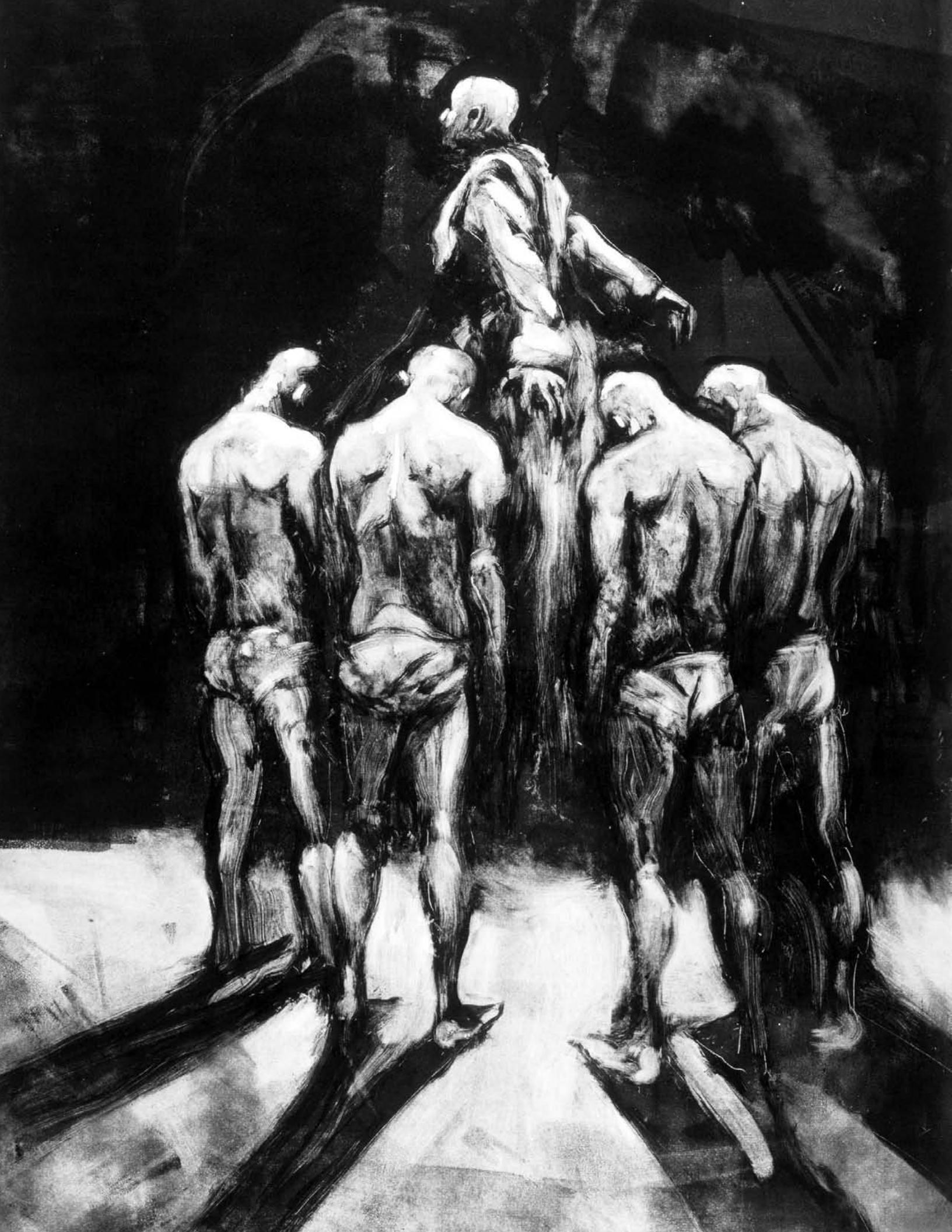
of gifts to ensure divine protection. These offers are made to what are commonly known as Spirits of Healing, wraiths who have taken on an active guardianship in their dealings with the living.

Favorite haunts for Spirits of Healing are Sacred Trees, of which each village possesses at least one representative. The trunk of the tree is pasted over with innumerable red cut-outs of infants born in answer to petitions. In other parts of the country, the branches are decorated with paper scrolls or hung with gaily colored rags in acknowledgment of answered prayer.

These inscriptions and other offerings represent a pool of Memoriam (3 - 5 points) to the Spirits of Healing. This group of wraiths can cure a living person of a disease or injury with the effectiveness proportional to the amount of Memoriam attributed to them. The rating of the pool is the number of dice that can be rolled per week by the group to heal inhabitants of the village (difficulty 8). Only one success is needed to heal a Health Level, two to cure a fatal disease, and three or more to execute genuine miracles. Of course, this sort of Memoriam can only be drawn upon from the wraith's local haunt, and not from one from a neighboring village. Botches will inflict a number of Health Levels of damage on the victim equal to the number of botches rolled.

Spirits of Healing are very careful about how often they work their healing arts, as they don't wish to be caught without power in case of an emergency. Spirits who use up all of their healing capability and are then called upon, unsuccessfully, lose 1 point of Memoriam from the town's central pool. This point will take six months of devoted effort without any failures to regenerate.





# Chapter Five: Unreal Estate

*spirit, excellence, further down the road,  
these are the tools you'll need further down the road.  
so let's pack it up and take it somewhere special...  
from a quintessential, existential nightmare  
to a sanctuary waiting in the sun*  
— Faith No More, “Spirit”

## The Jade Palace

**T**he Imperial Palace is located on a mountainous island deep within the Tempest, with only one known method of access: The Great Imperial Highway. Parts of the Highway run throughout the Kingdom, but all paths eventually lead to the Necropolis at Xi'an. From here the Highway ascends into the heavens, though the Tempest and to the First Gate. The Highway varies in length throughout the kingdom, but from Xi'an to the Palace it is a uniform 30 yards wide, paved with bricks of White Jade. A thousand different colors of soul-fire lanterns line the Highway, their many hues reflected in the surface of the Highway, holding the darkness of the Tempest at bay. It takes over a day to make the journey from Xi'an to the First Gate, and during this time it is forbidden to stop or loiter. If a wraith should pause, the lanterns will howl in agony (treat as a Dirge), causing fear in all who hear. This serves to get the wraith moving again, as well as alerting the Guard to stragglers.

The Immortal Guard watches over the Highway from Xi'an to the Palace, and guards all entrances to the Emperor's abode. Guardsmen in chariots and on horseback patrol the Highway, whipping on stragglers and protecting the Highway from Spectres. There is a constant flow of souls to and from the Palace: magistrates on government business, representatives of powerful families coming to court, shipments of enslaved souls from Hell and ambassadors from other Dark Kingdoms. The Guard carefully interviews each and every individual who seeks entry into the Palace, making sure that they have a legitimate business at the Imperial Court. Often souls wait at the First Gate for days.

Passing through the heavily guarded and fortified First Gate, one enters a great courtyard teeming with wraiths. Low-level magistrates move about, performing tasks for their masters, while other spirits loiter in hopes of gaining an audience. There is a kind of market set up, where artisans sell their wares, and scholars, merchants and farmers offer their goods and services. Once the Guard admits one to the Palace,



it is assumed that they have a reason to be there, and no effort is made to remove wraiths from the Palace as long as they behave themselves. Many wraiths find their way into the Palace on some pretext and never leave, preferring the relative security of Palace life to the dangers of the Yellow Springs. Those without a family in the Yellow Springs are the most likely to seek their fortunes in the Palace, and many have been in the Palace for hundreds of years. There are many opportunities for an ambitious and aggressive wraith at the Imperial Court, joining one of the innumerable political factions in the constant struggle to gain influence with the Emperor and the Four Magistrates.

The Palace itself lies beyond the Great Court, beyond the Seven Dragons Gate. For centuries, Yu Huang has been expanding the Palace, drawing upon the new architectural innovations in the living world. There are 251 separate palaces within the greater Palace complex, as well as the great pagodas devoted to the Four Magistrates. Each Palace has been expanded several times over the years, and all contain extensive private quarters as well as guard rooms, quarters for the Imperial Concubines and facilities for government officials and the Emperor's advisors. A complex network of halls and courts links the various structures within the Jade Palace, and there is an extensive network of secret passages known only to a few. The discovery of one of these passages can be a source of great wealth to a wraith, who can then sell the secret to courtiers looking for an edge in the effort to gain the ear of the Emperor.

## Storyteller Note

Only the Emperor truly knows the Palace, as it extends for hundreds of miles. There is no point from which one can see the entire Palace, and there are no complete maps. Storytellers are encouraged to add whatever features they think are appropriate, for in a structure the size of Yu Huang's Palace, there is likely to be at least one of everything. Likewise, nearly anyone can be found somewhere in the Palace, hiding within the less traveled halls and courtyards. Emphasize the mazelike quality of the palace, as well as the opulence. Even the barest hallway is decorated in a manner suitable for the Emperor's eyes. Paintings and sculptures showing scenes from the Tale of Yu Huang abound, as well as artwork extolling the virtues of the Emperor.

Somewhere within the complex are the torture chambers and holding pens that the Emperor employed before the creation of Hell. The location of these chambers is a closely kept secret, known only to the Emperor and the Commander of the Immortal Guard. Rumor has it that Yu Huang uses these chambers to hold Spectres whom he is training to serve him. Others say that these chambers are reserved for the strange experiments of the descendants of Fu Xia and his fellow mages, and that the area is in some way connected to a Horizon Realm. None of this can be confirmed, and no one dares to ask the Emperor what the space is used for.

# Important Necropoli

## Beijing



ong considered one of the most stable Necropoli in the Jade Kingdom, in recent years Beijing has been rent by inter-family strife. The rising power of Communist families in the region has forced many ancient traditional families out of the city, causing great tension between them. By the 1980s the Communists had succeeded in eliminating

or driving away most of the less powerful traditionalists, leaving only a few ancient and powerful clans. Currently the two factions hold nearly equal power, with the traditional clans holding a monopoly on the Judges and the Protectorate, and the Communist families controlling the Militia and Censorship. In recent years the traditional families have undergone a resurgence as many new wraiths are disgruntled with the Communist Party of the living world, and want little to do with it in the afterlife.

The Communist families' base of power is located within the Forbidden City, the traditional residence and seat of power of the Emperor of China. In the Yellow Springs this formidable complex is covered with the slogans of the Communist families, exhorting Yu Huang and deriding the powerful clans of the city. Within the City itself, the Militia and Censorship have their headquarters. Wraiths constantly come and go, seeking audiences with the local magistrates. The Forbidden City houses most of the city's active Militia, and is the most heavily fortified structure in the Necropolis.

Where the Communists rule from the austere Forbidden City, the traditional families have chosen the scenic Summer Palace as their headquarters. A network of gardens, temples and palaces, the Summer Palace is one of the most beautiful structures in China, living or dead. The Judges of the Dead and Protectors of the Prosperous Realm hold their inquiries here, among the reminders of the beauties that life once offered. In the Yellow Springs, much of the beauty is gone, tainted by death, but the site still holds the power to stir those who enter it.

# Hong Kong

The Emperor is very wary of contact with Western wraiths, and therefore keeps a close eye on Hong Kong. Although a British possession in the living world, Yu Huang keeps a tight reign on the Necropolis ever since he went to war with the Hierarchy to maintain control of it. Although Westerners who die in the region are technically subjects of the Hierarchy, surprisingly few of them seem to make it out of the city except in chains. Hong Kong's magistrates have little love for foreigners, and the Hierarchy no longer has much leverage here. The Protectorate keeps a close eye on all foreigners in the city, and will seize upon the slightest opportunity to take them into custody.

The Hong Kong Necropolis contains one of the few Midnight Express stops in the Jade Kingdom. A small contingent of Immortal Guard watch over the stop in order to ensure that it is not used to support rebel activity in any way. The Midnight Express is the easiest way for a foreigner to enter the Jade Kingdom, and many Westerners are more than a little awed by the sight of an Immortal Guardsman greeting them as they step off the train. No one is allowed to enter the Emperor's domain without official business of some sort, and it is not easy to bluff your way past the stone-faced Guardsmen.

The population of the Necropolis itself contains mostly traditional families, with only a few Communists lurking about. Traditional ways are still very strong in Skinland Hong Kong, and many living families still perform the proper rites and sacrifices honoring the dead. Because of the strong sense of filial piety and religious devotion in the region, the wraith population of Hong Kong (and Taiwan as well) is much higher than in other regions. Wraiths tend to have their Fetters looked after and their Passions sustained for a longer period of time. Hong Kong is also home to a large number of Buddhist priests and other religious figures offering to show others the way to P'eng Lai. This kind of behavior only encourages further scrutiny on the part of the Emperor and the Protectorate.

# Nanjing

Nanjing is one of the most densely populated Necropoli in the Jade Kingdom, principally because of its great age. An important population center since the 5th century BC, Nanjing has accumulated a large population of wraiths during this time. The Necropolis is also unusually peaceful when compared to other regions of the Jade Kingdom, and has escaped much of the chaos associated with the Great Revolts. As a result of these factors, Nanjing is home to some of the oldest and most powerful wraith families in the Kingdom, and is a bastion of traditional values and loyalty to the Emperor.



McNaill



By far the most powerful family in the Necropolis is the Zhu clan, descendants of the first Ming emperor, Tai Zu. Tai Zu reigned from 1368 to 1398, and was interred in a mausoleum on the outskirts of Nanjing. Upon entering the Yellow Springs, the Emperor luckily had the help of several loyal subjects who had passed on before him. With their help he was able to pay off the local officials and still retain a large portion of his burial gifts. Tai Zu worked hard to ensure that every member of the Ming Dynasty followed him into the Yellow Springs, and helped to increase the family's power. While he was not always successful, he did manage to save many of his relatives from Oblivion or overzealous Censors.

Today, the Zhu clan controls every magisterial office in the province surrounding the region, and Tai Zu rules the region almost as a separate kingdom within Yu Huang's domain. As long as Tai Zu remains loyal and upholds Imperial Law, Yu Huang is willing to give him relative freedom in the province. The Zhu family's hold on the region has ensured its relative peace and stability, and Tai Zu has never made a move that the Emperor might find suspect. Nevertheless, the Emperor is wary of the family's power, and keeps a close eye on them.

## Shanghai

Site of the beginnings of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, Shanghai has had an important role in Communist Chinese politics. Even as the living Shanghai introduces aspects of a market economy, the Communist families of the Jade Kingdom are tightening their hold on the city. There are no official traditional families in the Shanghai Necropolis. All wraiths must register with one of the established Communist families or form their own, as the Censors refuse to register anyone who is not Communist. This does not sit well with some, but the majority of the denizens of Shanghai fully support the policy as the best way to achieve peace.

Shanghai is also home to a surprisingly powerful arm of the resistance movement Struggle Against the Qin. The movement's influence in the city remains largely unrecognized by most government officials, no doubt because the Struggle controls most of the offices in the Protectorate. The Provincial Judge, one Hang Xu, has suspicions about the activities in the city, and has sent investigators. Should the full extent of the Struggle's control of the local government be revealed, it would trigger a scandal that would rock the Empire and give new hope to rebel groups everywhere. Hang Xu fears the consequences of this revelation, and is proceeding slowly and carefully in his investigations.

# Noteworthy Haunts

## The Shaolin Monastery



amous throughout the world for martial arts, the Shaolin Temple is also an important religious center. As the one of the official religious centers of the Jade Kingdom, the Shaolin Monastery is a common pilgrimage site for wraiths throughout the Yellow Springs. The monastery itself and the nearby Pagoda Forest are powerful haunts, attracting those monks who do not go on to Oblivion or P'eng Lai. In the monastery buildings, wraiths may come to learn the secrets of Shaolin martial arts, along with the official tenets of Buddhism, as taught in the Jade Kingdom. A Censor has been assigned to the haunt, charged with registering all those who come to learn at the monastery. Those who have learned the secrets take on certain responsibilities within the Kingdom. They are required to act as paragons of virtue and piety, setting an example for the rest of society.

The Protectorate carefully screens all monks who teach at the monastery, ensuring that they have no rebel ties and that they are full citizens of the Jade Kingdom. The monks themselves are considered members of a unique family, and anyone who wishes to become a monk must break all other familial ties. Despite this condition, many monks retain secret relationships with their wraith families, and use their position at the monastery to further their own family's goals. Monks who die and come to the Yellow Springs are automatically inducted into the Shaolin family, continuing their existence as teachers.

## The Great Wall

Stretching from the Bo Hai Gulf of the Yellow Sea in the east to a point deep in the Gansu Province in the west, the Great Wall of China spans 1500 miles and is one of the largest engineering and building projects ever carried out. Sections of it had been originally built in the 4th century BC as fortifications, but it wasn't until Qin Shihuang united the country that all the sections of the Wall were joined. He did it as he did all other things, with ruthlessness and with an eye towards ridding his empire of dissidents. The Wall was joined by what amounted to prisoner gangs who died as they worked, and the bodies of the fallen were built into the Wall's structures. Those wraiths whose bodies were entombed in the Wall took it as a Haunt, and it towers magnificently across the Shadowlands.

The Wall was essentially a symbol of protection and the Empire's might. Its height ranges from 15 to 30 feet, with watchtowers rising at regular intervals. The Wall is 15 to 25 feet wide, and along the top runs a 13 foot roadway which was used for centuries as a major communication channel. Behind the Wall there were, at intervals, permanent camps, with water and sanitation facilities for troops. These camps still exist in the Shadowlands, and the Empire makes use of them.

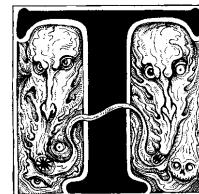
Over the years troops watched from the towers, sometimes dying for the protection of the Empire. With each death, with each story of how the Wall strengthened the Empire, it became a little more real in the Shadowlands and the Shroud around it thinned. Tales of the ghosts of faithful watchmen who warn villagers of all dangers are still told.

The wraiths serving on the Wall in the Shadowlands have, as one of their Passions, the protection of the Quick who dwell in the Wall's shadow. They can also gain Pathos from the reverences that the locals perform for their help. As a historical note, members of the garrisons did intermarry with local families, so there may be family ties between the wraiths on the Wall and some of the living villagers.

Even though sections of the Wall have fallen, they were for the most part rebuilt, maintained and believed in as protection. Since the populace in the area believed in the protection of the Wall, its counterpart in the Shadowlands gained those capabilities.

There is no pattern or shape to what lies beyond the Wall. Depending on where and when one looks out from the watchtowers, one can see many things: the Shadowlands of Mongolia, patrolled by the ghosts of the Hsiung-nu tribe against whom the Wall was originally built; the roiling seas of the Tempest or even the shores of other Dark Kingdoms. Spies sent into Hierarchy territory when Stygian lands appear beyond the Wall report a massive buildup of troops, primarily bearing the insignia of the Skeletal Legion. In response, Yu Huang has moved many of his troops onto the Wall as well, preparing for an attack that many of his advisors feel is imminent.

## Rivers



wo rivers run the length of China from the western border to the Yellow Sea, the Yangtze and the Yellow. The two are as different from each other as night and day, but both are used as primary means of travel and communication in the Shadowlands. The Yellow River, nicknamed Hwang He ("China's Sorrow"), flows through the north, while the Yangtze, called Chang Jiang ("China's Fortune"), flows through the south. Each river has earned its nickname through their physical characteristics and their history.



## China's Sorrow

The Yellow River has a catchment area of 250,000 square miles, and runs from Qinghai Province west from the Kunlun Mountains to a giant delta at the Bo Hai. Much of the path of the river is sluggish, and the interior regions that the Yellow River meanders through are notorious for a very concentrated and very wet rainy season.

Unfortunately, the river descends only 600 feet over its last 600 miles, and therefore attempts to flood and drop its load of silt on the surrounding countryside. As these areas are thickly settled, there have been 3000 years worth of dikes built in an effort to control this flooding. However, the only permanent effect the dikes have had is to cause the riverbed itself to rise, inevitably spilling the river over the tops of its barriers. When this happens, the dikes are built even higher, beginning the cycle again.

In the Shadowlands, the dikes have been built to an unimaginable height, and their constant re-fortification is an ongoing project. Built mostly from White Jade, the barriers now boast guardhouses behind them, as the river is a favorite hiding place for Spectres. In addition, armed patrols cruise up and down the flood, keeping an eye out for both rebels and Spectres. The upper reaches of the river are known to harbor several resistance groups, and expeditions are mounted almost annually to the Yellow River's headquarters in hopes of wiping these rebels out. Local Maelstroms have been known to burst the dikes, spilling floodwaters and the Shadow-eaten out to ravage the local countryside.

## China's Fortune

The Yangtze has a catchment of 714,000 square miles, is 3,500 miles long and feeds the most fertile and economically strong areas of central China. It begins in the Kunlun Mountains as well, but empties into the East China Sea. For the first half of its course it is known as Jinsha, or "Golden Sands," and runs swiftly through the gorges that mark the boundary between Tibet and Sichuan, and then loops southward.

Far more hospitable to the Emperor's servants in the Shadowlands than the Yellow, the Yangtze is the main communications route for most of the Empire. It is home to few spectres, though river pirates are a constant problem. In places the river extends to 10 miles or more in width, but even at this great size far fewer troops are assigned to patrol the Yangtze than the Yellow.

# Conquered Territories

A great nation needs more people;  
A small country needs to serve.  
Each gets what it wants.  
It is fitting for a great nation to yield.

—Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*



souls gathered from the Conquered Territories are the basis for the very fabric of society in the Jade Kingdom. Without foreign souls, the Emperor could not assure his subjects of their freedom from slavery. Citizens of the Empire have existed with this sense of security for well over a millennium, and it is not something they will give up willingly. If Yu Huang's foreign revenues should disappear, widespread rebellion would soon follow. Fear of this drives the Emperor toward ever harsher repression within the Conquered Territories, with the ultimate goal of enslaving every non-Chinese soul who enters the Yellow Springs from the living world. The leading families of the Empire, both traditional and Communist, willingly support the Emperor's program abroad, driven by both racism and greed. They have nearly as much to lose as the Emperor himself, for they are the ones who hold the lucrative reaping rights for the Conquered Territories, collecting souls for Hell while garnering a substantial portion for themselves.

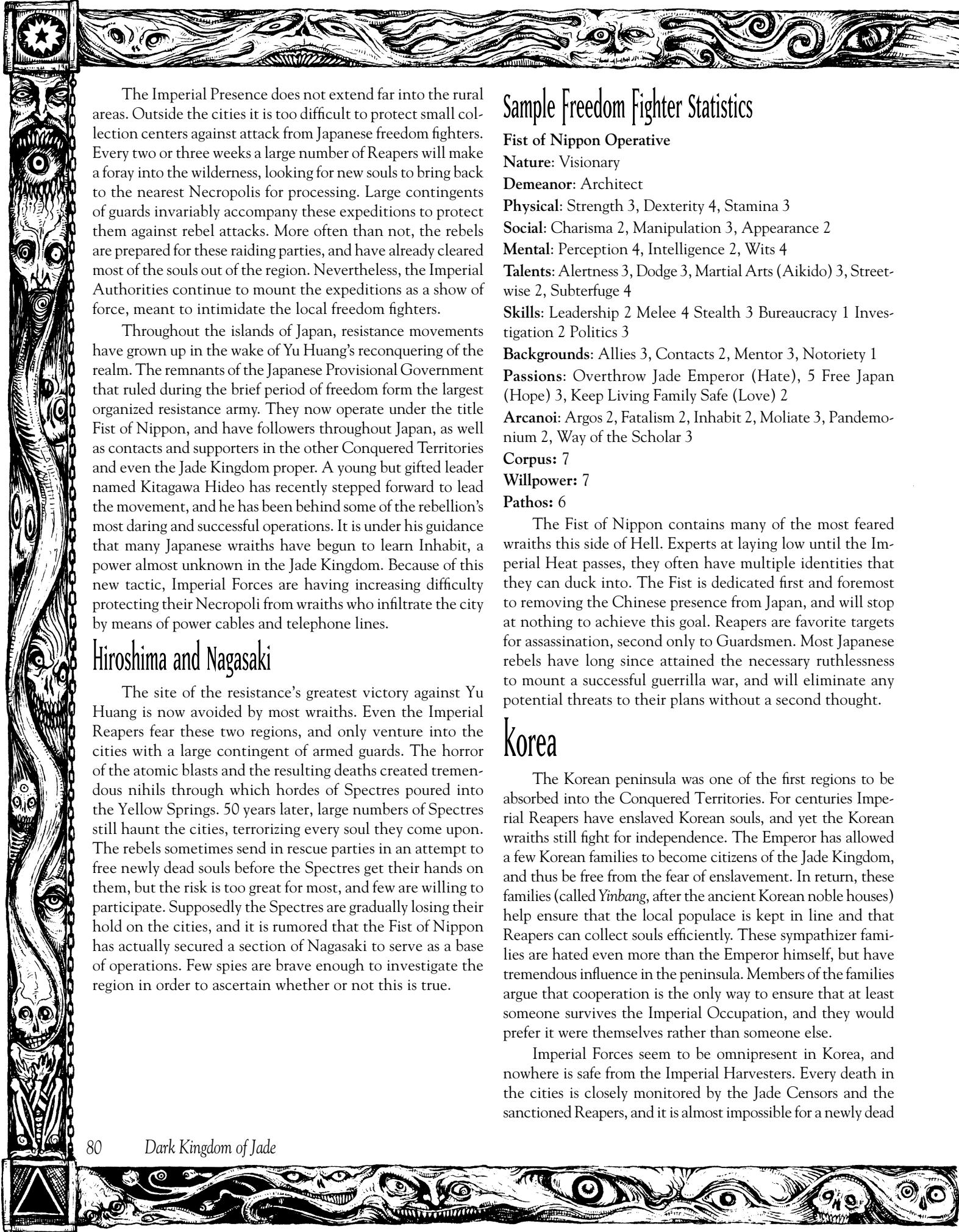
What began as a few raiding expeditions outside of the Middle Kingdom has now become an entire institution with its own complex bureaucracy. Representatives of each of the Four Branches are assigned to the Conquered Territories, but it is the Censors who have the most authority in the collection of souls. The Censor governing a territory auctions off the rights to reap individual geographic areas of the Conquered Territories, as families offer bids based on how many souls they think they can deliver to Hell in a single year. The family with the highest bid wins the contract, and is entitled to keep any souls in excess of their bid. The Imperial Army maintains garrisons throughout the Conquered Territories in order to quash rebellions and protect citizens of the Empire. The Judges and Protectors have a limited role in the Territories, and concern themselves almost exclusively with the governing of those citizens of the Empire living within the Conquered Territories.

## A Note on Race

Although this book often refers to citizens of the Jade Kingdom as Chinese, this is an oversimplification. The Emperor considers all ethnic groups whose territory lay within the Kingdom at the time he repealed the Laws of Enslavement to be citizens. The vast majority of these are Han Chinese, but there are also well over 40 other ethnic groups, including peoples from parts of Mongolia and Tibet. Yu Huang does not always keep up with current events in the living world, but in general, anyone whose family comes from within the Chinese state is considered a citizen. This is also extended to areas like Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macao and those Chinese living in Singapore. All others are considered foreigners, and are subject to enslavement at the Emperor's whim. Many new wraiths have strong moral objections to this practice, but this is of little concern to Yu Huang.

## Japan

By far the most troublesome of the Conquered Territories, Japan is a hotbed of organized resistance. Only recently the entire territory rose up in armed revolt, and it has taken years for the Emperor to fully reassert his authority in the islands. Even now, the Imperial Presence in the Japanese Shadowlands is tenuous in many places, as rebels wage a constant guerrilla war against the Imperial Reapers. The Jade Kingdom concentrates its forces in the cities, and the Japanese Necropoli are armed camps patrolled by Imperial Army troops and squads of Reapers who immediately enslave any new souls. Entrance into a Necropolis is strictly monitored, and no one may leave or enter without permission. Only Chinese wraiths are free to move about the city, and even they must be able to prove that they have business in the region, either with the Territorial Government or with a group of Imperial Sanctioned Harvesters. There is little room for anything but greed, paranoia and fear in the great cities of Shadow Japan. The Empire's servants are constantly on the lookout for new threats to their lucrative slave trade, real or imagined.



The Imperial Presence does not extend far into the rural areas. Outside the cities it is too difficult to protect small collection centers against attack from Japanese freedom fighters. Every two or three weeks a large number of Reapers will make a foray into the wilderness, looking for new souls to bring back to the nearest Necropolis for processing. Large contingents of guards invariably accompany these expeditions to protect them against rebel attacks. More often than not, the rebels are prepared for these raiding parties, and have already cleared most of the souls out of the region. Nevertheless, the Imperial Authorities continue to mount the expeditions as a show of force, meant to intimidate the local freedom fighters.

Throughout the islands of Japan, resistance movements have grown up in the wake of Yu Huang's reconquering of the realm. The remnants of the Japanese Provisional Government that ruled during the brief period of freedom form the largest organized resistance army. They now operate under the title Fist of Nippon, and have followers throughout Japan, as well as contacts and supporters in the other Conquered Territories and even the Jade Kingdom proper. A young but gifted leader named Kitagawa Hideo has recently stepped forward to lead the movement, and he has been behind some of the rebellion's most daring and successful operations. It is under his guidance that many Japanese wraiths have begun to learn Inhabit, a power almost unknown in the Jade Kingdom. Because of this new tactic, Imperial Forces are having increasing difficulty protecting their Necropoli from wraiths who infiltrate the city by means of power cables and telephone lines.

## Hiroshima and Nagasaki

The site of the resistance's greatest victory against Yu Huang is now avoided by most wraiths. Even the Imperial Reapers fear these two regions, and only venture into the cities with a large contingent of armed guards. The horror of the atomic blasts and the resulting deaths created tremendous nihilis through which hordes of Spectres poured into the Yellow Springs. 50 years later, large numbers of Spectres still haunt the cities, terrorizing every soul they come upon. The rebels sometimes send in rescue parties in an attempt to free newly dead souls before the Spectres get their hands on them, but the risk is too great for most, and few are willing to participate. Supposedly the Spectres are gradually losing their hold on the cities, and it is rumored that the Fist of Nippon has actually secured a section of Nagasaki to serve as a base of operations. Few spies are brave enough to investigate the region in order to ascertain whether or not this is true.

## Sample Freedom Fighter Statistics

### Fist of Nippon Operative

**Nature:** Visionary

**Demeanor:** Architect

**Physical:** Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

**Social:** Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

**Talents:** Alertness 3, Dodge 3, Martial Arts (Aikido) 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4

**Skills:** Leadership 2 Melee 4 Stealth 3 Bureaucracy 1 Investigation 2 Politics 3

**Backgrounds:** Allies 3, Contacts 2, Mentor 3, Notoriety 1

**Passions:** Overthrow Jade Emperor (Hate), 5 Free Japan (Hope) 3, Keep Living Family Safe (Love) 2

**Arcanoi:** Argos 2, Fatalism 2, Inhabit 2, Moliate 3, Pandemonium 2, Way of the Scholar 3

**Corpus:** 7

**Willpower:** 7

**Pathos:** 6

The Fist of Nippon contains many of the most feared wraiths this side of Hell. Experts at laying low until the Imperial Heat passes, they often have multiple identities that they can duck into. The Fist is dedicated first and foremost to removing the Chinese presence from Japan, and will stop at nothing to achieve this goal. Reapers are favorite targets for assassination, second only to Guardsmen. Most Japanese rebels have long since attained the necessary ruthlessness to mount a successful guerrilla war, and will eliminate any potential threats to their plans without a second thought.

## Korea

The Korean peninsula was one of the first regions to be absorbed into the Conquered Territories. For centuries Imperial Reapers have enslaved Korean souls, and yet the Korean wraiths still fight for independence. The Emperor has allowed a few Korean families to become citizens of the Jade Kingdom, and thus be free from the fear of enslavement. In return, these families (called *Yinbang*, after the ancient Korean noble houses) help ensure that the local populace is kept in line and that Reapers can collect souls efficiently. These sympathizer families are hated even more than the Emperor himself, but have tremendous influence in the peninsula. Members of the families argue that cooperation is the only way to ensure that at least someone survives the Imperial Occupation, and they would prefer it were themselves rather than someone else.

Imperial Forces seem to be omnipresent in Korea, and nowhere is safe from the Imperial Harvesters. Every death in the cities is closely monitored by the Jade Censors and the sanctioned Reapers, and it is almost impossible for a newly dead

soul to escape capture here. The only hope for a new wraith is that he is one of the rare souls claimed by a sympathizer family, but few are this lucky. Those who die in the countryside have a slightly better chance of escaping capture, but even here it is hard to avoid the Emperor's grasping hand. Patrols constantly sweep across the countryside, scouring the land for souls. Those who do manage to elude the Reapers often find refuge in one of the small resistance groups hiding in the less traveled regions.

The Korean resistance movement was largely destroyed during the last Great Revolt, and is still trying to rebuild itself. Undertaking few large actions against the Imperial Government for fear of revealing their hidden bases, they occasionally raid slave caravans on their way into the Jade Kingdom, but only when they can muster enough force to totally overwhelm the guards. Although the rebels hate the sympathizer families as traitors and cowards, there are a few of these families who actively aid the resistance movements. They provide safe places for the rebels to flee to, and pass on information about patrols of Reapers and the movements of slave caravans. However, total retribution follows the unmasking of any traitorous sympathizer families. The entire family is sent to Hell, and any members among the living are harassed into poverty and degradation. For this reason, few sympathizer families are willing to aid the rebels.

## National Dragons

During the last Great Revolt, a group of Korean wraiths developed a new use for the Arcanos Moliate. The rebels joined the Corpora of 10 or more wraiths together, sculpting the outer surface of the group into the form of a great dragon. The minds of the participating wraiths were then joined by means of a special variation of the Way of the Scholar. The 10 wraiths were thus able to act in unison, through a hive-mind eerily similar to that used by Spectres. Dubbed National Dragons, these powerful constructs wreaked havoc with the Imperial Army. When the Emperor finally defeated the Korean rebellion, he destroyed all of the extant National Dragons. However, rebels have retained the secrets of creating these fearsome fighters, and there are rumors that several of the Dragons hide within the rural regions of Korea, waiting for a prime opportunity to strike out against the Imperial Oppressors.

**Physical:** Strength 9, Dexterity 4, Stamina 8

**Social :** Charisma 1, Manipulation 6 (for intimidation only), Appearance: subjective

**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

**Abilities:** Athletics 4, Brawl 5, Dodge 3, Intimidation 5, Stealth 2

**Arcanos:** Argos 2, Moliate 5

**Pathos:** 25

**Corpus:** 55





## Southeast Asia

The Shadowlands of Southeast Asia cannot technically be classified as Conquered Territories, but rather as sort of client states. The Emperor has made agreements with the various powerful families and rulers throughout Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. As long as the rulers of these lands pay an annual tribute in souls and relics, the Emperor allows them to rule themselves. In return for loyalty, the Emperor insures that none of the ruling families will be ousted from power. Should a rebellion occur, the Emperor sends his armies into the areas to support his clients.

These client states do not encompass the same national boundaries that we recognize in the living world, as many of these boundaries are artificial ones created in accordance with the whims of colonial powers. Rather, there is a patchwork of small kingdoms, often centered around large cities. These small states are often very competitive, but the Emperor discourages open warfare. Instead, they are hotbeds of espionage and secret societies, working on a hundred secret agendas while trying to avoid Yu Huang's attention. The Emperor sends representatives to each state to serve as advisors, spies and ambassadors, and to ensure that tribute is paid. The local peoples universally

fear and respect these citizens of the Empire, although most hate them as well. Many are resentful of the Emperor's rule, and rebels from other Conquered Territories and the Middle Kingdom itself often find refuge in the back streets of Bangkok, Saigon and other large cities.

### Bangkok: Gateway to Central Asia.

The capitol of the living Thailand is a thriving Necropolis in its own right and the closest thing to a free port the Jade Kingdom has. The city is far from Xi'an and the Jade Palace, and the Emperor has relatively little influence here. Bangkok's tribute is small compared to most of the other client states under Yu Huang's rule. Theoretically the Lord of Bangkok is expected by the Emperor to keep the smaller local states in line, but the truth is that Bangkok would be extraordinarily troublesome to subdue. It is an open secret that the Lord maintains strong ties to the rulers of Swar and other potent Shadow realms. As for the populace, the local wraiths are happy to pretend to be the loyal servants of the Emperor as long as he keeps out of their business. Yu Huang would be outraged if he learned just how many rebels find refuge within the Necropolis, but the city welcomes any comers, as long as they have cash.

## Vietnam: The Lost Legion

The Jade Kingdom and Stygia have ostensibly agreed that each Kingdom is entitled to the souls born in the nations over which they have sway. In practice, both sides often break this agreement, especially when there is nothing the other Kingdom can do about it. In the second half of this century, thousands of Westerners have died fighting in Asia, and few of them have managed to find their way back to Stygia. During the Korean and Vietnam wars, the Emperor needed as many souls as he could get, and his Censors were not picky as to where they came from. Faced with a continuing war in Conquered Japan, the Emperor recruited many of the dead from these wars directly into the Imperial Army. From 1950 to 1975, the Emperor drafted a large number of Americans and Europeans into military service.

The Chinese treat these soldiers as second-class citizens, giving them the worst duties and forbidding them to tend to their Passions or resolve their Fetters. Many have since fled the Emperor's service, forming their own resistance movement based in the jungles and cities of Vietnam. Known as the Lost Legion, this small, but very active rebel group has developed ties with many of the warlords in Southeast Asia, as well as some of the Legions in Stygia itself. The group is committed to overthrowing Yu Huang at all costs. They blame the Emperor for their misery in the afterlife, and many believe that they would have gone to Heaven if not for the interference of the Jade Censors. The Legion has taken on many religious aspects as well, linking Christian and Buddhist teachings with the ideas of the Legion's commander, Colonel Roth. Roth preaches that Yu Huang stands between his men and their eternal rest, and unless he is destroyed, they will all be doomed to this hellish afterlife forever. The Emperor is aware of the Lost Legion, but so far has not dealt with it.

## Tibet

Tibet is called "The Roof of the World" as half of the country is situated on a plateau that is between 4000-6000 feet above sea level. The country includes the Himalayas and the tallest mountain in the world, Mt. Everest. The almost entirely mountainous terrain suffers from poor soil and a fierce climate, making it a difficult place to live. There are only 4 million Tibetans in all of China, and only 2 million of those live in the Autonomous Region of Tibet. Service in Tibet by a Chinese government employee or soldier is rewarded with extra money for the harsh conditions and the separation from family and home.

It is a common sentiment that Tibet's closeness to Heaven makes it a very religious country. Before the Chinese takeover, nearly a quarter of the population was a member of some religious order. Even today it is common when journeying through Tibet to see a woman whirling a prayer wheel, an old

man counting the 108 bead rosary looped over his entire arm, or prayer flags on every peak, to hear the piercing tone of a *dorje* rubbed around the rim of a *trilpu* bell to ward away evil, smell the fragrance emanating from a juniper hearth set on a holy spot as offering and blessing, and see piles of *Mani* stones inscribed with the universal mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum" near temples and otherwise unmarked pilgrim paths.

In Tibetan legend, before there were any humans, Chen-rezi, the Bodhisattva of compassion was said to have come to the mountains in monkey form to enjoy the scenery and contemplate the world from Mt. Kongpori. In the midst of his meditations, he heard the constant crying of a mountain demness, an incarnation of Drolma, the Great Goddess, who lived alone in the ice caves of the mountain. Hearing her distress, he went to her, and they coupled, producing six children. Those six children became the first six tribes of Tibet.

This origin story, in many ways, reflects the beginnings of the religion in the area. The religious base of Tibet is Buddhism, but deeply rooted in the older, local animist belief called Bon. Each religion has changed to work with the other and create a new unified whole, as in the marriage of their origin story. When the Communists took over the country, the effect upon the Tibetan religious community was disastrous. The orders were closed, first by decree and then by force, sending thousands upon thousands into the Shadowlands.

The beliefs of the Tibetan people have shaped the Shadowlands about the Roof of the World. The mountains have energies that can be passed onto specific wraiths because they are imbued with the emotional energy of the living people that pray to them and believe in them as protectors. These beliefs are so strong that Tibetan wraiths gain Pathos very easily from the prayers that are directed toward them (every Tibetan wraith starts with at least one point in Memoriam). Local ruling Passions have to do with religion, the respect for life and hatred of destruction of the land. Shrines have been erected everywhere for memorable spirits, and the prayers offered at these shrines feed the wraiths to which they are dedicated.

Tibet is currently subjugated by the People's Republic of China. This is but the latest chapter in a history reaching back to the unification of Tibet in the sixth century AD, when the ruling king took as one of his two wives a daughter of the first Emperor of the Ch'ing dynasty.

In 1949 Tibet severed ties with China, and by October of 1950, the Chinese army marched into Tibet. An agreement was reached in 1951 granting Tibet autonomy; this lasted until the 1959 uprising in Lhasa, which caused the 14th Dalai Lama to flee to exile in India. The fighting was finally suppressed, and in 1965 Tibet was made into an Autonomous Region, one of five in China. Another uprising occurred in 1989, and was put down brutally. It was not until April of 1990 that martial law was lifted. To this day, the Chinese are still accused of human rights abuses and the complete suppression of Buddhism in their administration of Tibet. Human rights activists estimate



that as many as 90% of the Buddhist monasteries in Tibet have been shut down or destroyed.

Resistance to Chinese rule in Tibet is difficult. The harshness of the local countryside makes it impossible for a group of guerrillas to survive long, simply from lack of provisions and resources. There is nearly no access to helicopters, modern weaponry and training equivalent to that which the Chinese military possesses, thus crippling any resistance.

Opposition in the Tibetan mountainside in the Shadowlands is much more viable than in the Skinlands. The resource of living human belief and emotion, the basic tools of the wraith freedom fighter, are plentiful here. Since few of the Chinese military's technological advances are transferable into the Shadowlands, the advantages that the terrain gives to the locals is overwhelming. The unique magic of Tibet derives from their belief in the spirits of the land and their descent from a mountain goddess/demon. The shrines to specific places store the prayers of the living people for the area itself. This stored Pathos can be used by any Tibetan wraith anchored to the area who wishes to take responsibility for the region. The wraith can only use the Pathos for the defense of the site from invaders of non-Tibetan origin. The local magic also Moliates the Tibetan wraith into the image of the mountain demoness/goddess/demon/god associated with that particular area, and binds the wraith to move only within the boundaries of the shrine's power.

If the wraith goes beyond the boundaries of the shrine's influence, even unwillingly, she loses all the powers granted to her and cannot regain them until returns and pledges herself again. Even then, sites have occasionally refused to renew the agreement, especially if the wraith left deliberately.

Unfortunately for the wraith population of Tibet, relatively few of the Quick become Restless here. This explains why, even with the overwhelming advantage provided by the spiritual support of the living, the dead of Tibet could never break free of the Imperial Yoke. There simply were never enough of them. In recent decades more and more Tibetans, particularly those whose demise could be directly traced to the Chinese occupation, have become wraiths, and these spirits have swelled the ranks of the Tibetan resistance. Of late, the Emperor has found Tibet to be almost as troublesome as Japan. Over a dozen Immortal Guardsmen have been transferred into Lhasa, an unprecedented maneuver as the Guard almost never leaves China proper.

## The Bugis

For centuries, the Bugis have been renowned for their skill at sea. Originally from the island of Sulawesi in the Malay Archipelago, the Bugis spread throughout the East Indies, extending their empire as their pirate fleets became the most feared naval force in the region. Every year, huge pirate fleets would sweep out from the archipelago and attack surrounding sea lanes. When European travelers came to the Spice Islands, they had to deal with the Bugis, and they quickly grew to fear them. Remnants of this fear survive to this day in the English language. The term "boogey man" was brought back by English sailors in reference to the Bugis pirates and used to frighten their children.

Of the thousands of Bugis ships launched over the centuries, many were sunk either at war or by nature. It was not uncommon for whole crews to become wraiths, with their ships surviving with them as relics. As there was little central authority in the region at the time, minor kings held small kingdoms in the Shadowlands, and they were unable to project their power outside their Necropoli. The Bugis wraiths took advantage of the situation, establishing their own safe ports

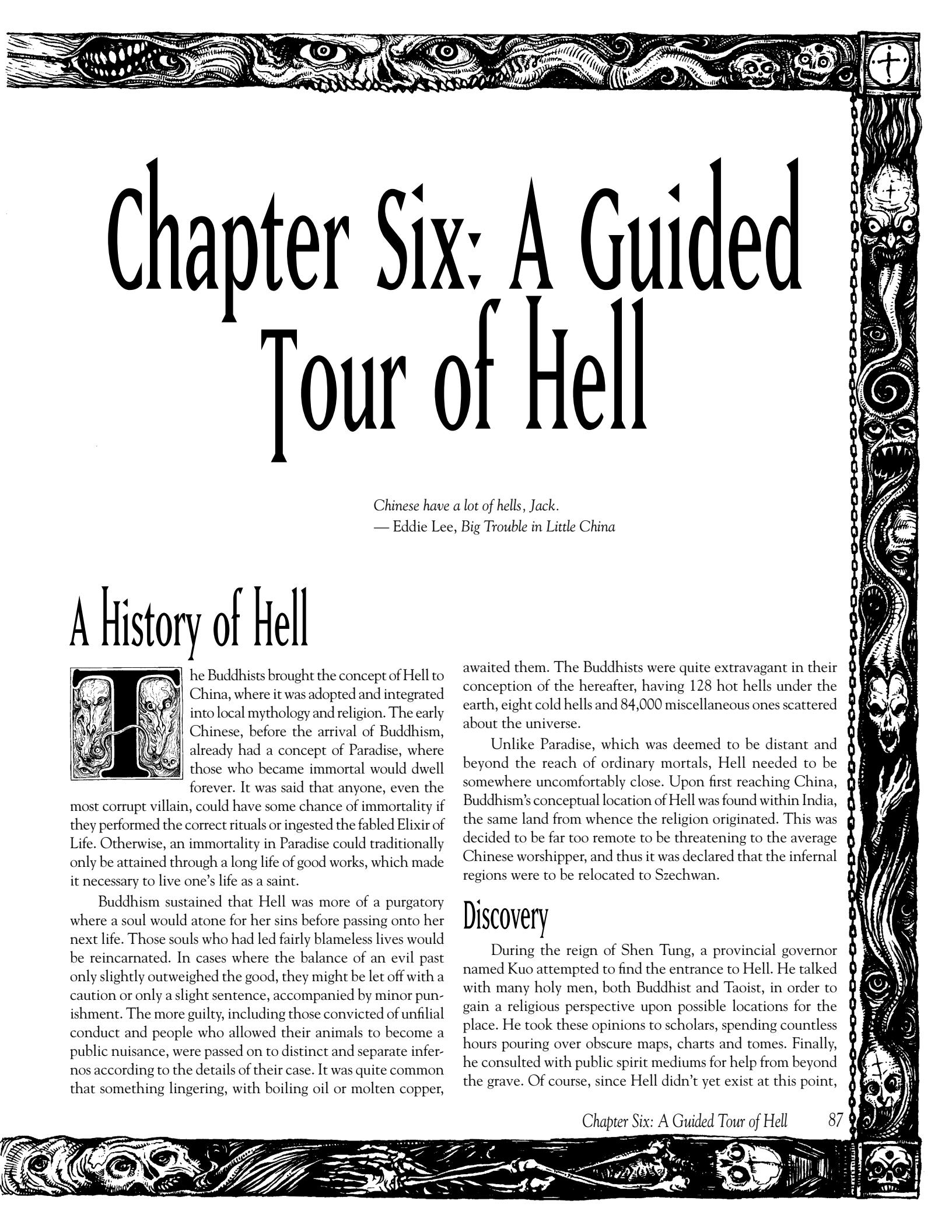
from which they made raids into other realms, capturing souls and enslaving them.

The Bugis soon learned the secrets of the Tempest, and became especially skilled at finding byways and passages through its storms. Bugis ships have been known to offer passage to those wraiths who fear to travel on their own. Such passage always has a high price, and the Bugis frequently take their passengers as slaves instead. The Bugis have also managed to establish a relationship of some sort with the Spectres of the region. The exact terms of their agreement are unclear, but it can be reasonably assumed that the Bugis make offerings of captive souls in exchange for safe passage.

Bugis fleets are a relatively common sight, both in the Yellow Springs and in the Tempest surrounding the Jade Palace. The Emperor has used the Bugis in the past, but he has also had to fight against them. For now he tolerates their presence because there is little he can do about them. The bases from which the Bugis operate are hidden within the Tempest, and the pirate fleets are adept at slipping away from Imperial Patrols. Nevertheless, the Bugis seldom raid the Jade Kingdom. The Emperor pays well, and the pirate captains do not want to alienate him completely.







# Chapter Six: A Guided Tour of Hell

Chinese have a lot of hells, Jack.

— Eddie Lee, *Big Trouble in Little China*

## A History of Hell

**E**he Buddhists brought the concept of Hell to China, where it was adopted and integrated into local mythology and religion. The early Chinese, before the arrival of Buddhism, already had a concept of Paradise, where those who became immortal would dwell forever. It was said that anyone, even the most corrupt villain, could have some chance of immortality if they performed the correct rituals or ingested the fabled Elixir of Life. Otherwise, an immortality in Paradise could traditionally only be attained through a long life of good works, which made it necessary to live one's life as a saint.

Buddhism sustained that Hell was more of a purgatory where a soul would atone for her sins before passing onto her next life. Those souls who had led fairly blameless lives would be reincarnated. In cases where the balance of an evil past only slightly outweighed the good, they might be let off with a caution or only a slight sentence, accompanied by minor punishment. The more guilty, including those convicted of unfilial conduct and people who allowed their animals to become a public nuisance, were passed on to distinct and separate infernos according to the details of their case. It was quite common that something lingering, with boiling oil or molten copper,

awaited them. The Buddhists were quite extravagant in their conception of the hereafter, having 128 hot hells under the earth, eight cold hells and 84,000 miscellaneous ones scattered about the universe.

Unlike Paradise, which was deemed to be distant and beyond the reach of ordinary mortals, Hell needed to be somewhere uncomfortably close. Upon first reaching China, Buddhism's conceptual location of Hell was found within India, the same land from whence the religion originated. This was decided to be far too remote to be threatening to the average Chinese worshipper, and thus it was declared that the infernal regions were to be relocated to Szechwan.

## Discovery

During the reign of Shen Tung, a provincial governor named Kuo attempted to find the entrance to Hell. He talked with many holy men, both Buddhist and Taoist, in order to gain a religious perspective upon possible locations for the place. He took these opinions to scholars, spending countless hours pouring over obscure maps, charts and tomes. Finally, he consulted with public spirit mediums for help from beyond the grave. Of course, since Hell didn't yet exist at this point,

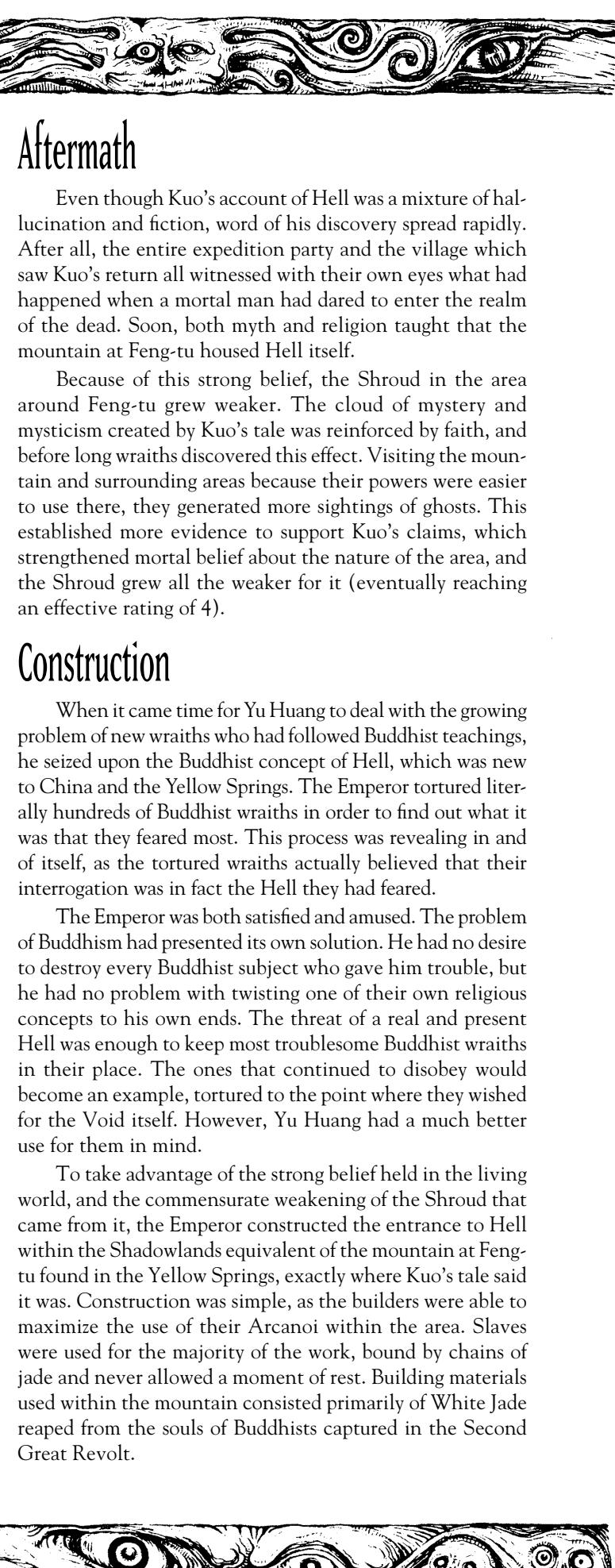


the spirits were confused as to what he was looking for. Kuo thereafter deemed such contact to be unproductive, presuming that the fear of Hell clouded spirits' minds as to its exact location.

At long last, Kuo decided that Hell was located in a mountain near the temple at Feng-tu, where a particularly large cave entrance was to be found. Organizing an expedition, he had himself lowered in a box, down into the maw of the deep, pitch-black vertical entrance. He went alone "in order to demonstrate his bravery." The fact of the matter, however, was that he wanted to be the first person to know whether he was right or wrong about the location of Hell.

After Kuo had spent hours within the bowels of the mountain, and with nary a tug on the rope, the expedition became worried for the safety of their governor. Soon, though, the signal came, and they pulled the box back to the surface to find Kuo in a frightened haze, his clothes burned and torn to shreds. His face was marred by several scrapes and lacerations, and was also blackened and charred by the same flame which had apparently consumed his clothes. They hurried him to the nearest village, hoping that he would recover soon.

Kuo later recorded his experience on a monument at Kuei-chou, in the north-east of Szechwan. His story told of how he had heard the cries of tortured souls below. When the box that carried him settled on the ground far below the cave entrance, he set out on foot, lantern in hand, to find the source of the voices. Entering a winding maze of caverns, he finally discovered a path which led to a fine city with wide streets and a grand Hall of Justice. However, he was caught by surprise by the guard of the city, who realized he was of the living. Kuo turned and fled, losing his way in a few minor infernal hells where he received his many injuries, but finally making his way back to the box before the guard could catch up with him.



The truth of the matter was that Kuo, upon his box settling to earth, set out to explore the caverns too eagerly. In his haste, he stumbled over his own feet after turning but a few corners. His lantern fell beside him and lit his clothes on fire. Flailing about upon the ground, he managed to finally smother the flame, but found himself completely lost in darkness, deep below the surface. In an attempt to feel his way back out, he ran into a pocket of foul gases which made him pass out. After a few hours of dreaming about the hells he'd hoped to find, he found his way back to the box, pulled himself inside and signaled for rescue.

## Aftermath

Even though Kuo's account of Hell was a mixture of hallucination and fiction, word of his discovery spread rapidly. After all, the entire expedition party and the village which saw Kuo's return all witnessed with their own eyes what had happened when a mortal man had dared to enter the realm of the dead. Soon, both myth and religion taught that the mountain at Feng-tu housed Hell itself.

Because of this strong belief, the Shroud in the area around Feng-tu grew weaker. The cloud of mystery and mysticism created by Kuo's tale was reinforced by faith, and before long wraiths discovered this effect. Visiting the mountain and surrounding areas because their powers were easier to use there, they generated more sightings of ghosts. This established more evidence to support Kuo's claims, which strengthened mortal belief about the nature of the area, and the Shroud grew all the weaker for it (eventually reaching an effective rating of 4).

## Construction

When it came time for Yu Huang to deal with the growing problem of new wraiths who had followed Buddhist teachings, he seized upon the Buddhist concept of Hell, which was new to China and the Yellow Springs. The Emperor tortured literally hundreds of Buddhist wraiths in order to find out what it was that they feared most. This process was revealing in and of itself, as the tortured wraiths actually believed that their interrogation was in fact the Hell they had feared.

The Emperor was both satisfied and amused. The problem of Buddhism had presented its own solution. He had no desire to destroy every Buddhist subject who gave him trouble, but he had no problem with twisting one of their own religious concepts to his own ends. The threat of a real and present Hell was enough to keep most troublesome Buddhist wraiths in their place. The ones that continued to disobey would become an example, tortured to the point where they wished for the Void itself. However, Yu Huang had a much better use for them in mind.

To take advantage of the strong belief held in the living world, and the commensurate weakening of the Shroud that came from it, the Emperor constructed the entrance to Hell within the Shadowlands equivalent of the mountain at Feng-tu found in the Yellow Springs, exactly where Kuo's tale said it was. Construction was simple, as the builders were able to maximize the use of their Arcanoi within the area. Slaves were used for the majority of the work, bound by chains of jade and never allowed a moment of rest. Building materials used within the mountain consisted primarily of White Jade reaped from the souls of Buddhists captured in the Second Great Revolt.

The actual hells were constructed around an underground city named Ti Yu, or Earth Prison. Imperial Engineers followed Kuo's tale closely, building the walled city complete with wide streets and a Hall of Justice. The construction techniques used here were similar to those used in the building of the Great Imperial Highway and Jade Palace. Just as both the Palace and Stygia lie within the Tempest, so does Ti Yu. The cavern entrance to the mountain at Feng-tu, and the subterranean maze that exists under the mountain itself, are both similar to the Veinous Stair.

## Proceedings

The harshest punishment given by the legal system of the Jade Kingdom is Hell, but even Hell has finite resources. The flow of souls into Hell cannot be too swift, or the personnel that work there will be overwhelmed, and retention centers would soon become overcrowded by those waiting for their punishment to be carried out.

Because of this matter of efficiency, not all Judges have the authority to send a convicted soul to Hell. However, all have the ability to send in a request to their superiors, suggesting that a criminal be sent there. When it is believed that the crimes of a wraith merit such punishment during periods when Hell is reaching capacity, common Judges must forward final judgment to their superiors. It is then up to commandery Judges to make the final decision, and provincial Judges have the final word, as usual, on whether the sentence is to be carried out.

In times where Hell is operating at peak efficiency and retention centers have plenty of space, maximum sentences can be fulfilled. When this luxury is not available, however, certain cases always have priority in receiving this full severity of punishment. The souls of foreigners are almost always sent immediately to Feng-tu for appropriate processing. Criminal cases, where a crime is against the state, usually justify full punishment. In civil cases, it is highly unlikely that the guilty party is sent to Hell, though some provincial Judges have been known to send entire families there in extreme cases, and rumors of bribery, favoritism and political motivations always follow such occurrences.

When it is officially determined that a prisoner is to be sentenced to Hell, she is taken to a retention center under the control of the staff of the appropriate provincial Judge. Once such an order is given and the soul has been handed over by the sentencing court, clemency is rare. Delivery to a retention center is commonly seen as the beginning of the end for a wraith, and her family mourns her passing from the Yellow Springs.





# The journey



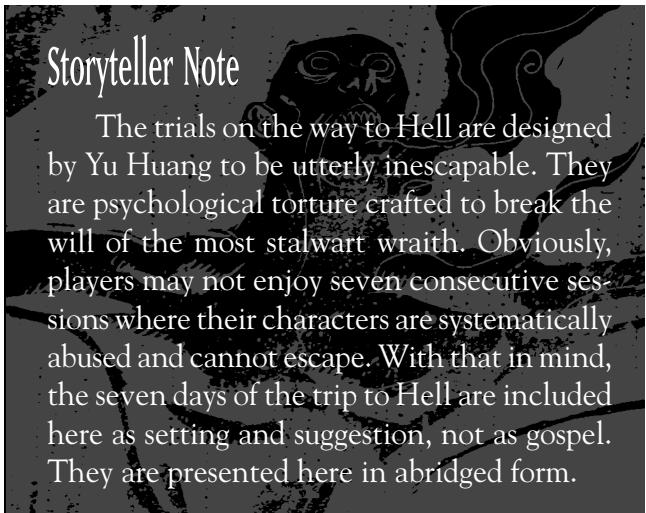
rovincial Judges are responsible for organizing the movement of prisoners from retention centers to Feng-tu. Prisoners are practically herded there twice a moon, starting along a path which leads from the temple at Feng-tu to the cave entrance into the mountain itself. Armed escorts are present at all times, as are announcers who paired with each prisoner. These harbingers of doom walk to Hell with their assigned prisoner, proclaiming what is to happen at each stage of the journey but never offering any help.

The journey to Hell takes seven days, with each day spent wandering through a distinct infernal region. Each region provides what is an unwinnable test, designed to destroy any sense of hope.

There are a few means by which the handling of sentenced wraiths is made easier. First, the prisoner is fitted with a torc that inhibits the use of Arcanoi in a manner similar to that of Stygian manacles. Also, the torc eliminates prisoner escapes, as guards are still free to use Arcanoi and thus retain the upper hand in any combat. However, the wraith's arms and legs remain free, as mobility is important in the trials on the journey to Hell.

The path to Earth Prison runs down into the subterranean maze of caverns beneath the mountain. The path is filled with twists and turns designed to confuse even the best sense of direction, and seems to defy spatial awareness in places. At some point during the trip, the wraith will realize that she is being led out of the lower reaches of the Yellow Springs and into the Tempest, as the passageways become more surreal. Also, unbeknownst to all but the most sensitive of wraiths, once this point is passed, a wraith will lose contact with her Fetters, due to the twisted nature of the realm in which Hell is built. A wraith who successfully escapes a Harrowing will snap back to a place near where she lost all her Corpus, rather than at a Fetter. Because of this, the possibility of escape by a prisoner submitting to an intentional Harrowing is eliminated.

Soon, it is obvious that a section of Labyrinthine geography has been reached, where it is easy to create any sort of scene. The Imperial Engineers discovered a way to manipulate this region in a manner similar to how the Labyrinth responds to the manipulations of the *p'o*, creating truly bizarre and frightening scenery for the prisoner to travel through. Yu Huang had his engineers followed the Buddhist tales of Hell precisely, the only difference being that the journey of seven weeks was to be reduced to seven days to expedite the process. Each of the seven trials on the path to Ti Yu precisely imitates the stories about the infernal regions which were passed down through generations of the living. Later, when new wraiths passed on into the Yellow Springs, they too held this belief in Hell, and those that were unfortunate enough to undertake the journey were disheartened to find that it was no fairy tale.



## Storyteller Note

The trials on the way to Hell are designed by Yu Huang to be utterly inescapable. They are psychological torture crafted to break the will of the most stalwart wraith. Obviously, players may not enjoy seven consecutive sessions where their characters are systematically abused and cannot escape. With that in mind, the seven days of the trip to Hell are included here as setting and suggestion, not as gospel. They are presented here in abridged form.

# The Seven Days

## Day One

**T**he first obstacle on the way to Hell is the appearance of “bandits,” in reality tax collectors. Accusing the prisoner of stealing all of their possessions from the treasury of Hell, they will loot the prisoners thoroughly. A ludicrous fee will be demanded from the prisoners, and the bandits will take anything they can get, including Artifacts and relics, as payment. Those who refuse to pay are beaten, looted and then sent along. Those who cooperate suffer the same treatment. All items or moneys taken are deposited in the Treasury of Hell, to be embezzled or doled out later.

## Day Two

This is the trial of the Weigh Bridge and the so-called Scales of Goodness. Theoretically, righteous wraiths will register on the Scales as being feather-light. Of course, the scales have been rigged to that each wraith who sits in them registers as unrighteous. Any “unrighteous souls” are abused mightily, and some overzealous guardians of the Scales have been known to grind wraiths down to powder.

## Day Three

Day Three brings Bad Dogs Village, where *kuei-go* are kept. In fact, these particular *kuei-go* were, at one time, prisoners on the road to Hell themselves. As a part of their life sentence, these wraiths were transformed, harnessed and muzzled by devices of True Jade.

A wraith who is skilled at combat might be able to take a few of the creatures down before the sheer numbers and savagery of the *kuei-go* overwhelm him. However, the outcome of the struggle is never in question, as the fight is rigged from the start. *Kuei-go* are released one at a time, initially, to allow the wraith a fighting chance. The wardens of the village find this to be great sport, betting on how long the prisoner can last before being dragged down. As the fight continues, more *kuei-go* are released at steadily decreasing intervals until the prisoner is overwhelmed. Usually the Bad Dogs are called off at this point, and the wraith given time to heal before the next stage of the journey. However, casualties have been known to occur here.

### Sample *Kuei-go* Statistics:

**Physical:** Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

**Mental:** Intelligence 0, Perception 5, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Subterfuge 1, Stealth 2

**Corpus:** 15

**Willpower:** 8 with muzzle on, 2 with muzzle off

All *kuei-go* have teeth and claws which do aggravated damage.

## Day Four

On the fourth day, the wraith is brought before the Mirror of Retribution, which gives her a glimpse into what the future holds in store for her via a twisted form of Fatalism. A person who was kind and good is said to be reflected in all the beauty of innocence, but invariably the wraith, branded as a sinner, sees a reflection of a new life where she is portrayed as a beast. Images of swine and serpents are common, and the incident is best treated as a minor Harrowing. Of course, the visions the Mirror shows are false, and are designed to be as vicious and damaging as possible.

## Day Five

The fifth day of the journey offers solitary confinement, under the guise of a chance to repent for the sins the Mirror showed, and a devastating glimpse of the wraith’s family doing perfectly well without him. Time is often distorted during this trial, and this “day” can sometimes take a week or more of subjective time.

## Day Six

The most physically demanding of the journey’s torments occurs on this day. The prisoner is taken to the edge of the Inevitable River, over which span bridges of gold and jade. Of course, the escorts are allowed over the shimmering constructs, while the prisoner must use a single strand of rope. Straddling the cord, most wraiths can make the crossing on the single



rope (Dexterity + Athletics, difficulty 7, 4 rolls must be made without a botch. A botch indicates that the wraith has fallen into the river and must deal with the gigantic serpents that live there.). However, the guards posted at the river have at their disposal certain tools for making the crossing more interesting. They can cause winds to swirl around the rope, make a greasy rain fall or even summon the monstrous snakes that dwell in the river. Wraiths who fall into a Harrowing here, if they survive, return on the other side of the river.

#### Sample Serpent Statistics:

**Physical:** Strength 7, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

**Mental:** Intelligence 0, Perception 3, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Brawl 5, Dodge 4

**Corpus:** 35

**Willpower:** 2

## Day Seven

On the seventh day, the wraith enters the realm of Yen-lo Wang, Lord of the Underworld and Prince of the Wheel of Law, to whom a petition must be presented to expedite the process of due sentencing. Fortunately, their time also includes a visit with Mrs. Meng and Kao Chien-Li.

## Mrs. Meng and Kao Chien-Li

The one brief respite on the road to Hell comes courtesy of Mrs. Meng and Kao Chien-Li. Each wraith, just before finishing her journey, is turned over to the care of Kao Chien-Li, who leads her to Mrs. Meng's house. Any attempt to escape from Kao, whose eye sockets are empty and who plays a lute with astonishing skill, will simply get the offender captured by roving guards. Those who follow along are led to Mrs. Meng's dwelling. Kao will not answer many questions on the way, only telling the wraith somewhere along the way that they are going to visit Ms. Meng, who "wishes to speak with you." If pressed into further conversation, he will answer that his name is Kao Chien-Li, that he died "a long time ago," and that he has no love for the Jade Emperor, but nothing more. He will then lead the prisoner through the rolling hills and pleasant fields, so out of place here, to Mrs. Meng's dwelling.

There, Mrs. Meng will offer each guest tea. A small amount of food is offered as well, but there isn't enough for seconds. Mrs. Meng, who appears as a frail old woman, is not much for conversation, and will remain quiet for as long as possible. If pressed, she will answer in gentle and reassuring tones that she died "a long time ago," that she took in Kao as an adopted son,



and that she, respectfully, has no love for the Emperor. Also, if asked why the rest house is found on the road to Hell, she'll reply that she was there before the road was, and that the Emperor's men had no choice but to allow her to offer a bit of hospitality before the prisoner arrived in Hell.

That is the signal for the prisoner to be sent off to bed. Mrs. Meng will bid her guest a restful sleep, and says that Kao will return in the morning to escort the prisoner to Ti Yu, the capitol of Hell. Then she will retire to her own room for the night.

Those that sleep through the night will find it to be quite a restful Slumber, even though not at a Fetter (roll as for a Slumber, difficulty 6). If the visitor does not sleep and gets up to search the house during the night, they will find nothing of value or importance in the house, and Mrs. Meng will not be found if her room is visited. If the guest leaves the house and sets out on foot, she will eventually stumble upon a group of guards patrolling around the city of Ti Yu and be taken captive.

If the wraith sleeps straight through until morning, she will be awakened by Mrs. Meng, who prepares another meager meal with tea. After the food is either refused or eaten, Kao will arrive to escort the guest away from the house. If the visitor refuses to leave, Mrs. Meng will sigh and return to either her room or the kitchen, never to be seen again. Kao will plead with the prisoner to leave with him, or the guard will come to retrieve the wraith. Eventually guards do arrive to drag the miscreant off to Hell as Kao watches sadly.

If the visitor attempts to harm Mrs. Meng at any point, she will act hurt by the blows, shedding many tears, and will move with surprising speed to lock herself in her room. If the door is broken down, she will be gone. Should anyone attack Mrs. Meng, a guard will arrive almost instantly and drag the prisoner away.

Similarly, Kao has been gifted by Mrs. Meng to be able to shrug off blows. If attacked, he will refuse to help the prisoner any further, and will set out immediately back towards the closest guard post, somehow always managing to stay at least 10 paces ahead of the prisoner. If the wraith follows him, they will run across the guards, and the prisoner will be captured. Fleeing in another direction leaves the wraith wandering lost outside of Hell and a likely candidate to be captured by a roving patrol of guards.

Mrs. Meng is a Judge of another kind. She can see into the depths of the soul and into the past of the prisoner. She looks for truth, beauty and a sense of justice within. In the event that she finds these, her judgment extends to the next stage. If the guest treats both Mrs. Meng and Kao with respect, compliments Kao on his lute playing, accepts the tea politely and drinks the entire cup, does not ask for more food than is offered, does not raise a hand or voice against Mrs. Meng or Kao, gratefully accepts the room and sleeps through the night without searching or leaving the house, and acts with similar courtesy and respect the next morning, Mrs. Meng will make a final offer to the visitor. "All

the jailers take bribes," she says, handing a stack of Hell notes to her. "This might make your time easier."

If the notes are accepted, Mrs. Meng will nod politely and wave as the prisoner is taken to the nearest guard post. Indeed, if the notes are hidden well and not found, most of the workers in Hell take bribes if their superiors aren't around. These bribes can delay punishments for a while, but not forever.

If the money is politely refused out of courtesy and not suspicion, Mrs. Meng will nod, smile and wave as Kao takes the prisoner away. However, instead of arriving at a guard post, the pair comes to a fork in the road. "In spite the judgment of the Empire," Kao says, "Mother Meng has found you to be worthy of her kindness. Choose your way. To the right, you will find the way back to the Yellow Springs. To the left, you will find Paradise." At that point, he will walk away.

If followed or questioned further, he will only continue to reply, "Choose your way," sidestepping any attempted obstruction of his movement. If the wraith follows him too far and loses sight of the fork, she will not be able to find it again, instead stumbling across a guard patrol.

Just as Kao said, the left-hand path leads to Paradise, and the right brings the wraith back to a Fetter with his torc removed.

The area around Mrs. Meng's home is timeless. If two prisoners an hour apart on the way to Hell meet up in Ti Yu, both will speak of how they spent the night alone in Mrs. Meng's rest house the night before, even though they would not have seen each other there. Also, Kao's path takes a few hours in either direction, but somehow he manages to return to the guard post just in time to escort the next prisoner to Mrs. Meng's place for the night.

If the guest leaves with Kao but does not meet Mrs. Meng's exacting criteria, the two will arrive at a guard post within three hours, and the prisoner is handed over. If she tries to escape before then, the same will happen as on the journey to the rest house, as it is impossible to find Mrs. Meng's place once again once it drops out of sight.

## Mrs. Meng

Mrs. Meng is certainly not who she seems, but her intentions are entirely genuine. The bed is comfortable, the tea refreshing and the food entirely edible. She truly wishes her visitors well, but only so long as they are polite and grateful for her hospitality.

Mrs. Meng is not a wraith, and she now plays the role of a goddess protector. Indeed, she was present long before Qin Shihuang arrived in the Yellow Springs and declared himself Jade Emperor. When Hell was being built, she manipulated the construction so that it ran across her grassy lands, and the Imperial Engineers could find no way around her keep. When attempts were made to extract her by force, Qin's forces simply ceased to exist at her whim. Because of her power, the Emperor had no choice but to agree to allow all prisoners to enjoy her hospitality on the way to Hell.

## Kao Chien-Li

Kao Chien-Li was part of a Taoist secret society dedicated to the assassination of Qin Shihuang. The leader of this group was killed in a valiant attempt on Qin's life, and the rest were tracked down for execution. All save Kao went to ground, changing their names and running, but he refused to give up his music.

Eventually he was tracked down through his astonishing style and technique on the lute, instantly recognizable wherever he traveled. The secret police arrested him, but even Qin could not bring himself to have such a brilliant musician killed. Instead, Qin ordered that Kao be blinded, saying that it would make the bard play even better, and kept him in his Palace to entertain his court.

Kao bided his time, and never lost his hatred for the man who took his sight. He played his lute for the Imperial Court, concentrating on his music to keep himself calm and centered, so as to gain the court's confidence. Three years after his blinding, he filled his lute with lead, and, under cover of a conversation with the Emperor, attempted to bludgeon him to death. Unfortunately, due to his sightlessness, Kao missed. Qin ordered him executed in as painful of a manner as possible to a bard, with each of his fingers to be cut off, then his ears punctured so that he couldn't even hear his own tortured screams, and finally his throat slit open and vocal cords severed to silence him forever.

Mrs. Meng was the one to remove Kao's Caul, having followed him and his music for many years. She took him in and offered him the position he has now, foretelling of Qin's arrival in the Yellow Springs and subsequent rise to power as Jade Emperor. She also promised him that one day the Emperor would fall, and that Kao would be instrumental in the victory. This promise has been enough to keep Kao in her service for many centuries.

## The Trial

**H**e journey ends when the wraith is finally brought to the city of Ti Yu, and is walked through the streets in jade manacles to the Hall of Justice. Along the way, the prisoner is taunted by the inhabitants of the city, a menagerie of twisted and disfigured wraiths, transformed into the images of demons and devils so as to fit in with their job descriptions. The audiences for such events are always large, as the inhabitants of Ti Yu expect arrivals to be an exceptional source of amusement, and there is a long-standing tradition of abusing each prisoner as he goes by.

The actual trial and sentencing are brief. Yen-lo Wang, the Lord of the Underworld, presides over the court in the Hall of Justice. The prisoner is presented by one of the Ministers Wu-ch'ang Kuei, the Ghosts of Impermanence, but a verdict of "Guilty" is predestined. Most prisoners are then sentence to a lifetime in "material service," meaning that he is to be tortured until his soul is weakened enough to be able to be forged into White Jade.

Hell's main purpose is as a factory for the production of White Jade. In order for this process to be completed, though, a wraith has to be divested of all willpower and spirit. With luck, the journey to Hell has already broken the prisoner, and the sentencing and execution can be combined into one trial. Otherwise, this task is left to the workers of Hell, who show remarkable enthusiasm for their labor. The torture never stops for long, and any wraith who does not escape will break.

Once the torture is complete, the wraith is brought before the court a second time. Yen-lo Wang speaks once again, this time in the role of Prince of the Wheel of Law, proclaiming to the prisoner, "By the will of Ti-tsang Wang, King of the Earth's Womb, and Yu Huang himself, it is ordered that you be thrown into the Mill and ground to bits." Neither of the Ministers Wu-ch'ang Kuei are present this time. Instead, Ma Mien, the Horse Face Demon, and Niu T'ou, the Ox Head Demon, escort the prisoner to his final destination.

The two demons place the victim on the Wheel of Law and begin to spin it with titanic strength. There are eight exits around the Wheel's rim, and sooner or later every wraith escapes the relentless spinning through one. The exit chosen determines what the prisoner will be forged into. Whether it is considered luckier to be converted into a chair rather than a table is either speculation or a matter of philosophy, as nobody knows what state of consciousness a soul retains once converted into White Jade.

Once a wraith's fate is determined by the Wheel of Law, Ma Mien and Niu T'ou place him into a man-sized gristmill, whereupon the sentence is carried out and the soul is ground to bits. The bits are taken to a smelter and forged into an item to be exported from Hell back to the Yellow Springs, and that is the most common route out of Hell for prisoners.

## Afterlife in Hell

"What's that say?"

"Hell of Boiling Oil" .

"You're kidding..."

"Yeah, it says 'Keep Out.'"

— Jack and Wang, *Big Trouble in Little China*

Wraiths who are not being actively tortured are stored in public prisons underneath the Gates of Hell, so that the populace



of Hell can abuse them at will. Prisoners are constantly tormented and spat upon, and it is rare for a wraith to go more than six hours without being dragged off to a new torture. Imprisoned wraiths bear the marks of this treatment, as most are well on the way to being broken down into White Jade. It is rare for a prisoner to last more than a month in Ti Yu.

However, some hells are substantially more elaborate. These elegant hells are primarily for the entertainment of the inhabitants of Hell when off duty, and members of Yu Huang's court are also common at such events. Also, these particular hells are of a more insidious design, as they offer the unfortunate participant the freedom to make choices that she will most likely regret later on, if she lives.

## The Nine Abysses

The Nine Abysses is a name for a specific type of hell, in which a grid similar to a tic-tac-toe board is laid over a bottomless pit. The grid is some 10 feet below the earth's surface, and another grid serves to prevent wraiths from climbing up and escaping. Prisoners are shooed onto the narrow beams over the Abysses, bets are made on their

potential for survival, and then one at a time the *kuei-go* are turned loose. The Bad Dogs have considerably better balance than most wraiths, and are familiar with combat on this sort of terrain.

As if this weren't enough, spectators are allowed to use bows and arrows to shoot at the prisoner. This is great sport for them, and it is said that truly sadistic officers of the Empire venture to Hell on an occasional holiday simply to engage in the raw decadence of this particular entertainment. Rumor also has it that Yu Huang himself used to engage in the sport, and some even say that he still visits annually, in disguise, so that he may participate.

Prisoners who are particularly adept at this sort of combat are "recruited" to become *kuei-go* themselves, so that any strategies they learn during their stay may be used against the many prisoners who are to follow them.

No one knows what happens to those who fall into one of the Abysses. Popular belief is that one falls straight into the Void, and in this belief a great many prisoners dive straight down rather than face the *kuei-go*. Others claim that there is simply the infinite descent, and that death at the jaws of the *kuei-go* is infinitely preferable to an eternity alone with one's *p'o*.



## The Hill of Knives

Some wraiths are subjected to the torture of the Hill of Knives, a grueling torture that lasts a quarter-day. Large groups are introduced to this hell all at once, as the trial is intended to pit one wraith against another, to reduce spirits to animal savagery and destroy any sense of kindness or consideration.

The Hill itself appears to be a simple grassy knoll, 50 yards across, 20 yards wide and 10 yards high at the crest. It is built up within the confines of a tall walled courtyard, where guards and spectators sit atop parapets.

The event begins with the sentenced wraiths led in through a gate at one side, which is tightly closed behind them. The announcer then calls the sins common to the various wraiths in the group, as these packs are selected due to the similarity of their "crimes," as seen by the court. It is then declared that sentencing has begun, and the race begins in earnest.

Wraiths who are imprisoned in Hell go without shoes as a matter of course, but this has a special importance to a wraith running the Hill. Upon the starting whistle, knives within the ground below the feet of the wraiths begin to slowly press upward from their housings in the earth. The blades are planted so that their distribution is far too close for the wraith to stand comfortably. However, there are no knives in front of the wraiths, so the obvious solution is to step forward to where the knives aren't sprouting from the ground.

What happens next is an exercise in calculated sadism. Knives sprout from the ground, forcing the prisoners to climb the Hill and take refuge against the far wall. The tide of knives, which starts immediately behind the prisoners and pushes them forward, always stops just short of the wall on the other side of the Hill. However, the trapped wraiths are forced to run this race over and over again, with the knives sprouting more quickly and the Hill growing noticeably taller each time.

Soon self-preservation becomes so difficult as to eliminate any thoughts of kindness. Fallen wraiths now become convenient handholds and stepping stones. Civilized behavior is cast aside in the mad scramble to avoid the approaching blades. Unfortunately, no wraith is ever quite fast enough to escape this unscathed, and those who fall are likely to find a blade through their palms before they can rise.

When the last prisoner has fallen and been impaled for the spectators' amusement, the torment ends, and the wraiths are trooped back to their cages.

# The Sword Trees

Another elaborate hell is the ordeal of the Sword Trees. This hell, like many of the others, is built within a large walled courtyard, similar in design to an arena. The Trees, again, are a fan favorite, and betting on participants is commonplace.

The courtyard where the action takes place is essentially a maze, walled off by the Sword Trees themselves. The blades of the many branches of these Trees are made of True Jade. Sharp as razors, these branches protrude from the trunk of the Trees, another large blade in itself, at all angles. If a wraith is thrown into one of these Trees when caught unprepared, the result is gruesome and usually final.

The object of participants is simple: reach the exit of the maze. However, achieving this end in one piece is another matter entirely. As with the Nine Abysses, *kuei-go* are introduced to the system in order to make things more difficult for the participant and more entertaining for the spectators. As in the Hill of Knives, situations are so bad that they often force participants to work against each other for their own advantage.

Five wraiths are simultaneously released into the maze through the myriad gates around its perimeter, and after sufficient time has been allowed for betting, the event begins. Theoretically one of the many gates leading into the maze is open as an exit, but often these "exits" are opened late, or not at all. Eventually, *kuei-go* are released into the courtyard via the same gates through which the participants entered. The beasts have little difficulty navigating the maze, as they merely follow the prisoners' "scent," and before long the runners find themselves in combat with *kuei-go*. A wraith skilled at martial arts has a good chance of defeating a single beast, but doing so when a tumble in the wrong direction could prove fatal adds considerable difficulty to the task.

However, the deadliness of the Sword Trees can be used to the advantage of the wraiths. *Kuei-go* can be tricked into leaping directly into a Tree. Unfortunately, this maneuver can only be used once, as the beast learns quickly from its mistake if it survives. In addition to this trick, the Sword Trees themselves are mounted so that they can pivot in the manner of a merry-go-round. Wraiths can attempt to lure a *kuei-go* into the path of a swinging branch, trying to time the spinning of the Tree with the monster's leap. However, a wraith must make certain that the same spinning Tree doesn't catch him from behind.

A more despicable strategy is to spin a Tree in hopes of catching a fellow wraith off guard, crippling her and leaving her as *kuei-go* fodder. Some wraiths dispense with the Trees altogether and simply attack others, much to the enjoyment of the spectators. This only gains the wraith a little extra time to reach the exit for each opponent he cripples and abandons to be dispatched by the *kuei-go*. However, a wraith capable of such a

selfish act catches the eye of the referees, and is likely to be recruited for employment. Such a callous disregard for humanity is a quality upon which the management smiles.

There is no real reward for reaching the end of the maze first, save for a short stay of execution, since the exit gate closes and those left behind are left to be finished off by the *kuei-go*. Still, it has been noticed that some who win the race don't return to the holding cages, and are never seen or heard from again.

## Other Tortures

The Nine Abysses, the Hill of Knives and the Sword Trees are all rather elaborate hells designed primarily for the entertainment of outsiders. These venues aren't particularly efficient to run and maintain, as the time, space and manpower required for their operation far outweighs their throughput. Still, as a vulgar display of the wrath of Yu Huang, there is no better way to impress anyone who witnesses such an event.

However, Hell is in the business of "purifying souls of their sins" so as to convert them into White Jade, and more efficient means of doing this are found in great numbers. Hells that require fewer torturers or none at all are designed and used regularly, as opposed to the elaborate ones used for show or as "special lessons" for particularly troublesome prisoners.

## The Upside Down Hell

The Upside Down Hell is a common one, and is found in many different varieties. The layout is that of a typical dungeon with a low ceiling, hanging chains and fires burning all around. Within this space can be found many souls hanging head down, legs bound and laced with ropes and chains. The sound in the room can be almost deafening, as the unfortunate prisoners are usually howling in pain.

Wraiths sentenced to the Upside Down Hell are the more common sinners, and the tortures here are simple yet elegant. The whip and flogger are used most often, as great proficiency with them isn't necessary in order to achieve the desired results. Since raw pain is the goal here, with absolutely no concern for the longevity of the prisoner, the finesse of a master interrogator is unnecessary.

Occasionally, when warranted by situation or whim, a solid rod or cane is used to do the job with enough force to turn bones into pulp. In addition, fire and knife play are sometimes used, but not as often, as they take considerably more time to do properly. However, such pastimes do keep up torturer morale.

The cries and shrieks of torment are chilling, and can be heard from a distance. Pipes and chimneys of mystical construction lead from the Upside Down Hells to



the caverns beneath the mountain at Feng-tu. Just as Governor Kuo claimed to hear the cries of tortured souls below, Skinlanders who are brave enough to enter the mountain can hear these haunting screams through the weak local Shroud.

## The Bed of Fire

A common variant of hot hell is the Bed of Fire. This is an iron bed frame with a fire burning under it. The Bed itself is quite long across one dimension, making it a rack capable of holding 10 wraiths at once. The fire is constantly stoked and refueled, keeping the surface of the Bed glowing red hot.

Wraiths are stripped bare by their torturers and heaved roughly onto the Bed. There, they are kneaded and poked by hot iron implements and rolled back and forth, causing them an intense pain rivaled by few other tortures. The Corpus of a wraith burns and melts away, causing his plasm to turn into a charred black substance. Prisoners in this condition, even those with the strongest resolve, usually cry out for release through Oblivion itself. It is rare for a wraith to last more than two hours on the Bed of Fire, and even the most sadistic torturers rarely push this limit.

## The Jade Saw

This implement, forged of True Jade and designed to be operated by two men, is used to saw a wraith in half, vertically. Two captors take the wraith to a wooden pole, eight feet high, with two boards standing in front it. The victim is squeezed between the two boards and tied in place, and the planks, in turn, are tied to the pole. With the wraith now firmly ensconced, the demons begin to saw downward, beginning with the victim's head.

Only the strongest of souls can bear this without crying out. Since the wraith is fully made of homogeneous Corpus, there is no particular worry about the Saw passing through what the Quick might consider a vital organ, such as the brain. However, that doesn't mean that there is no pain, and many wraiths go straight from the Saw to a Harrowing.

However, it is often found that the Saw grates as it reaches the chest. The density of Corpus here is unexplained, but many believe that it is symbolic to the strength and purity of a wraith's heart, particularly in respect to his filial piety. If a wraith was true and faithful to his family and ancestors, then his "heart" will be more difficult to cut through, while the Saw will feel no resistance from a bad son's heart.

Wraiths who actually survive the procedure without falling into a Harrowing are sawed clean through, then roughly patched up and dragged around the city five times. After that, they are returned to their barracks to await the next punishment.

## Mundane Methods

Of course, there are even simpler damnations to be had. The traditional punishments of boiling oil or molten copper are used quite often, as the most common punishment for thieves of burial sacrifices is for the criminal to be "thrown into a mountain of fire."

Those wraiths who stir up enmity between relatives are sentenced to be "gnawed by dogs and pigs," which once again means that the wraith is pitted against at least one *kuei-go* under impossible circumstances.

Wraiths who are convicted for black market activities, or for the printing of counterfeit government seals and the like, are impaled on spikes and left there for days. This way, the wraith's *p'o* can keep her occupied and in sufficient mental anguish, allowing official torturers free to do "more important things."

## Release



Release from Hell is not an impossibility. Hell was meant as a lesson as well as a White Jade factory. As such, a large part of the power of Hell is in the tales and rumors it generates. Prisoners who are released return to society to tell of the horrors they saw, and quietly whisper of the tortures they only heard of from other prisoners. Large crowds gather to hear these tales, reinforcing the lessons of obedience to the Emperor. Descriptions of the horrible demonic inhabitants of Ti Yu are passed around by word of mouth, and the thought of the *kuei-go* of the Bad Dogs Village lingers in the back of the mind of every subject contemplating a move against Yu Huang.

The mildest punishment to be found in Hell, and therefore a quite uncommon one, is that of the *k'ang*. A portable pillory, it consists of a wooden board with holes for the head and hands, and on this the wraith's name and crimes are written. Wraiths held in a *k'ang* are allowed to roam the city to be exposed to public scorn. Suffering these many indignities for the period of one moon is deemed to be sufficient punishment for those wraiths thought to be redeemable.

Wraiths punished in this fashion have been chosen in advance to be released. Of course, their sins must not be of criminal nature, as crimes against the state are never to be tolerated. However, in some civil cases where the convicted party is known to have a talent for words and storytelling, they are sent to Hell for the express purpose of bringing the tale back to the people in order to reinforce Yu Huang's lesson.

While few wraiths at all who spend time in Hell are lucky enough to make it out alive, some at least are allowed to live



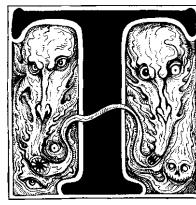
in Hell. Some prisoners are “adopted” by demons as personal slaves, if the wraith’s particular traits are amusing enough to his new master. Also, wraiths who perform in a cutthroat manner in some of the more elaborate hells are recruited to be demons in Hell themselves, if it’s decided that they are of more use as employees than as objects.

This is not always a desirable process. Some wraiths are selected to be lobotomized and Molted into *kuei-go*. In the process, they are reduced to the level of animals, and are “muzzled” with a device of True Jade that negates all higher thought. Unlike barghests, these *kuei-go* do not roam the Shadowlands, and are strictly confined to Hell.

Another way out of Hell is to be snuffed out of existence for the final time. Some wraiths fall into the Void while undergoing trials in Hells like the Nine Abysses, and others succumb to their *p'o* during torture-induced Harrowings.

There is a single note of hope to be found in all of this infernal madness. Periodically, writing in huge white characters is found on the buildings, walls and streets of Ti Yu, reading, “All the jailers take bribes.” The administration of Hell seems powerless to stop this graffiti. What’s more, it has been noticed that these writings always coincide with the disappearance of a prisoner or two....

## The Leading Citizens of Hell



The Taoist conception of the Underworld is a realm organized much on the lines of ancient Chinese jurisprudence, with a king instead of a magistrate, surrounded by attendants, runners and lictors. Because of this belief, Yu Huang modeled Hell’s administration along similar lines, mixing Taoist ideas into the primarily Buddhist design.

### Ti-tsang Wang

The ruler of Hell is Ti-tsang Wang, King of the Earth’s Womb, Supreme Authority of the Underworld. All others are subservient to him. Historically, it is he who delivered the converted souls from Hell back to the Yellow Springs, but he has long since delegated this task to his servants.

During the reign of the Emperor Su Tsung of the T'ang dynasty, a foreign Buddhist monk, Chin Ch'iao-chio, said to be from Sinlo in Korea, and of noble if not royal descent,



landed at Kiangsu and proceeded to the Chiu Hua Shan, Nine Flower Mountain, on the banks of the Tangtze-kiang river in Anhui province. He established a cult, and had many followers. He died at 99 years of age, sitting cross-legged in his coffin. Three years later, his tomb was opened, and the corpse was found to be in a perfect state of preservation — a sure sign of holiness. His disciples gave him the title Chin Ti-tsang (Golden Earth Womb), and later the title of deification, Ti-tsang Wang. The irony proved to be too much for Yu Huang to resist, and this paragon of holiness was appointed the Lord of Hell. Initially resistant to his duties, Ti-tsang Wang has long since come round to the realities of his position, and sees Hell as necessary.

Despite his grandiose title, Ti-tsang Wang is primarily an administrator and diplomatic representative to Yu Huang's court. As such, he is often away in transit between Ti Yu and the Jade Palace.

### **Yen-lo Wang**

Yen-lo Wang, the Lord of the Underworld, is subservient to, and distinct from Ti-tsang Wang. He is also known as the Prince of the Wheel of Law. It is his job to preside over the Hall of Justice of Ti Yu.

Yen-lo is said to be first man who died and found his way to the Yellow Springs. Because of this distinction, Yu Huang had him tracked him down and bestowed upon him the title of Lord of the Underworld, in conscious parody of Charon of Stygia. He now appears as terrifying Judge of the dead, looking like a green demon in red robes. In this guise, Yen-lo Wang is in fact wearing a mask, but no prisoner has ever gotten close enough to him to discover this fact.

### **The Ministers Wu Ch'ang Kuei**

The Ministers Wu-ch'ang Kuei, the Ghosts of Impermanence or "Unpredictable Ghosts," often act as messengers of Yen-lo Wang. They also present prisoners in the Hall of Justice. Yang Wu-ch'ang (Male Impermanence), painted white, presents the souls of those dying before their 50th year is out, while Yin Wu-ch'ang (Female Impermanence), painted black, presents those over 50. They are sometimes accompanied by the Horse Face Demon, Ma Mien, and the Ox Head Demon, Niu T'ou.

Yang Wu-ch'ang Kuei is usually shown with a pointed white hat bearing the four characters "One Glance Great Fortune." Often his tongue lolls out of his mouth as if he'd been hanged. Yin Wu-ch'ang is generally more restrained in her appearance.

## Horse Face and Ox Head

Ma mien, the Horse Face Demon, and Niu T'ou, the Ox Head Demon, attend the Wu-ch'ang Kuei as assistants and operate the Wheel of Law. Their strength and size are greater than that of any other wraith in the Yellow Springs. They appear as gigantic men with well-muscled bodies and the heads of animals. Generally they go unarmed, as their great fists are the only weapons they need. It is unknown whether they are actual demons, or merely servants of the Emperor Moliated into these monstrous forms. What is known is that they have never been defeated in combat, even when packs of rogue *kuei-go* have attacked them.

## Torturers

Hell is full of torturers. This is only to be expected, as torture is the leading industry of Ti Yu. What is unusual is that most of the torturers in Hell were once prisoners who were plucked from their torments and made employees. The remainder tend to be former Judges or soldiers who were overzealous in their duties. All live in terror of being found unworthy of their new posts and being made prisoners; therefore they attempt to outdo each other in coming up with new, original methods of inflicting pain.

All torturers choose an epithet for themselves. After all, Hell is supposed to be populated by demons, not wraiths. Many torturers submit to being Moliated into monstrous forms to better fit their new names and identities, a practice upon which the Emperor smiles. Among the more famous (or infamous) torturers currently working in Hell are Three Finger Demon, whose hands have been Moliated into three-taloned claws; Plaguebearer, a woman with the face and tail of a giant rat and the appetites of a vulture; and Iron Mask, a wraith with a polished mask of Stygian steel welded to his face. These three names are enough to set strong men quivering in the Yellow Springs, but in Hell they are the objects of adoration. Every new torturer wants to be as vicious as Three Finger Demon, as terrifying as Plaguebearer and as brutally efficient as Iron Mask.

To create a torturer character, use the following numbers as a guideline:

**Nature:** Conformist, Deviant or Fanatic

**Attributes:** 9/5/3, usually concentrating in Physical

**Abilities:** 13/11/7, with at least two levels of Brawl and one in Medicine and Intimidation

**Arcanoi:** 7 points, with Moliate and Way of the Farmer common

**Pathos:** 8

**Corpus:** 10

**Willpower:** 7





Most torturers have been Moliated into monstrous forms. Extra arms, fangs, scales and bat wings are common equipment. Most torturers will have an attack that does aggravated damage. Those without natural equipment will carry weapons, most often whips or maces.

## Kuei-go Trainers

Even in Hell there are pariahs, and in Earth Prison those who train the *kuei-go* fit that description. Most wraiths are uncomfortably aware that *kuei-go* were once as aware and human as they were, and yet have been reduced to beasts. *Kuei-go* trainers are seen as the agents of this degradation, and their presence reminds others uncomfortably that no one is safe from the Emperor's wrath.

Thus, the keepers of the *kuei-go* are isolated. Dwelling either in Bad Dogs Village or in the Keeper's Quarter (really a ghetto) of Ti Yu, they keep to themselves when not caring for their charges. Unlike most of the torturers, very few trainers were once prisoners. Instead, they voluntarily came from the Yellow Springs to take up the role. Most were without family or the survivors of families that were destroyed. Even so, their voluntary descent into Hell makes them suspect in the eyes of those who have tasted Earth Prison's torments.

The keepers have organized their society in imitation of the Empire, with one Master Keeper and four Lesser Masters below her. Each of the trainers follows one of the Lesser Masters, and there is spirited competition between the followers of each Master as to who can create the fiercest *kuei-go*. However, keeper society is close-knit, and the four branches will close ranks against any outsider.

The actual training and keeping is straightforward. Finished *kuei-go* are delivered to the pens in Bad Dogs Village and trained to attack by heavily armored keepers. Few keepers have not been savaged by their charges at one point, but there is pride when they point to their scars, which they keep as badges of honor. The keepers also take the beasts to and from destinations like the Nine Abysses and the Maze of Sword Trees. They release the *kuei-go* into the hell on command, and are responsible for rounding the beasts up once all of the required kills have been made.

Keepers are fiercely protective of their *kuei-go*, in the manner of owners of pit bulls. The death of a favorite has driven more than one wraith into a Harrowing, and each beast has a name that is known to all of the keepers.

To create a trainer character, use the following numbers as a guideline:

**Nature:** Caregiver or Loner

**Attributes:** 10/6/5, never concentrating in Social

**Abilities:** 15/11/7, with at least one level each of Crafts, Dodge and Melee

**Arcanoi:** 8 points, with Keening and Way of the Farmer common

**Pathos:** 7

**Corpus:** 9

**Willpower:** 8

Keepers often wear rags or furs stitched with insignia that only make sense to other keepers. They are quiet, shy and suspicious of outsiders. They rarely go armed, but then again they rarely leave their homes without at least one *kuei-go*.

## Smelters

Once the tortures are finished, the real business of Hell is at hand: White Jade. It is the smelters who turn broken Corpus into useful materials. Smelters are generally magistrates who were caught with their fingers in the metaphorical pie. Unlucky ones are sent to Hell for torment, while those with

useful Arcanoi (especially Way of the Artisan) and strong family connections are sentenced to terms as smelters.

Smelting is backbreaking labor, as the smelters are pushed to produce as much White Jade as is humanly possible. Over every four smelters is an Overseer with a quota to meet, and should she not make that quota, a smelter who is behind schedule can end up as product instead.

To create a smelter character, use the following numbers as a guideline:

**Nature:** Often Conniver or Architect

**Attributes:** 9/7/6, usually concentrating in Social

**Abilities:** 15/11/7, with at least two levels of Politics and one of Crafts

**Arcanoi:** 10 points, with 5 in Way of the Artisan.

**Pathos:** 5

**Corpus:** 8

**Willpower:** 5

Smelters appear harried and drained, and generally wear simple clothing. Like prisoners, they do not wear shoes, but go barefoot as a reminder of what could have happened to them.



# Chapter Seven: The Quick

**I**n the lands whose Shadowlands are dominated by Yu Huang, the living have many different strategies for dealing with the dead. Festivals give them sustenance, mediums make their wishes heard, and if necessary, exorcists banish them. The dead are as much a part of Chinese life as the living — sometimes more.

## The Family

*While the parents live, serve them according to the rites. When they die, bury them according to the rites and make offerings to them according to the rites.*

— Confucius

**T**he family looms large in Chinese history and culture, affecting every aspect of the living world as well as the land of the dead. It has always played a central role in Chinese religion and philosophy, particularly within the Taoist and Confucian traditions, and even Buddhism became a family-oriented religion in China. Traditional Chinese families set up shrines and tablets honoring a variety of household gods and spirits, but central to these shrines are the tablets dedicated to the departed relatives. Pious families offer incense and sacrifices to the departed souls, praying to them for guidance and offering the solace on their journey through the afterlife.

## Ancestor Worship

During certain festivals and holidays, it is especially important to pay tribute to departed souls. Accompanied by the male members of the family, the master then makes three deep bows before the family gods and the ancestral tablets. The altar is garnished with the usual Wu Kung, an incense burner flanked by two candles, and two vases of flowers. The ceremony is named *Pai Chia T'ang*, or Saluting the Family Hall.

The ancestral tablets are slips of wood, set in a wooden plinth bearing the posthumous name of the deceased in raised or gilded characters. The family shrine usually only contains five or six tablets, going back for up to five generations, as it would be impossible, even in a family hall, to find room for the 30 to 40 generations of which most families can boast. More remote ancestors are inscribed on rolls hung in the ancestral hall.

The discourse between the living and the dead embodies the world view that the living and the dead are not inherently separate as they are in Western thought. Life and death are simply two aspects of one existence, and so the worlds of the living and the dead are merely parts of the universe as a whole. It is only natural that the living should continue to honor their departed relatives, for they are older and wiser than the living, and have much to offer in the way of guidance and even protection from the vagaries of life and death. Likewise, why should the dead forget their family when they die? The family is always the central pillar supporting one in life as well as death. The sacrifices and prayers of the living give



the dead the hope and succor they require to face the harsh realities of Yu Huang's realm. Without one's family, the world is a very lonely, dangerous place.

The practice of ancestor worship dates back many millennia in China. What began as rituals centered on the death of a monarch spread to encompass families at all levels of society. From the distant past down to modern times, the Chinese continue to honor their dead, and the dead continue to help their living relatives as best they can.

**System:** For most wraiths in the Jade Kingdom, the living family remains their most important Passion as well as their main source of Pathos. Because of the role of the family in much of traditional Chinese society, this would probably be the case in any event, but there is often more to it than that. The sacrifices and prayers of the living tie the wraith to the family, even more so than most wraiths are tied to the objects of their Passions. As part of a family, a wraith is expected to perform certain familial duties, and is expected to receive certain rewards in return.

Each player who takes the Living Family Background must take at least as many dots in the Passion Family Welfare as they have dots in the Background, although they are free to take more. This Passion involves any powerful emotional event that stems from the living family. The wraith gains Pathos from happiness, love and prosperity within the family, and from the sorrow and pain of those who mean the family ill. The strong bond between the living and the dead means that it is easier to gain Pathos from one's family, which a wraith does at difficulty 6. However, it is likewise more difficult to gain Pathos from those outside one's family, and the difficulty is raised to 8. This means that there are many opportunities for the wraith to gain Pathos as long as the family is doing well.

However, in times of trouble, the wraith has much to lose if the family suffers. When the living family undergoes severe trauma of some sort, the wraith may very well gain Angst. The player rolls his Family Passion against a difficulty determined by the severity of the negative emotions. For lesser problems, such as grave financial problems or legal difficulties, the difficulty is 8 or even 9. For severe problems such as relocation or the forced splintering of the clan, the difficulty can be as low as 6. The wraith receives one point of permanent Angst if she gets one or more successes. If she botches, she is so distraught by the situation that she is spurred into action, and actually gains Pathos equal to the amount of dice rolled. These Pathos must be channeled towards aiding the family in recovering from the traumatic situation. If they are not used in an appropriate manner (as dictated by the Storyteller), the wraith gains permanent Angst equal to the Pathos that was used improperly!

# Fetters

Chinese wraiths often have a variety of Fetters, just as Stygian wraiths do. However, the Chinese often keep a shrine to honor the departed ancestors. If such a shrine exists, then the wraith must take it as a Fetter at a rating equal to his Family Background. There is a special bond between the wraith and the shrine, enforced by the prayers and sacrifices of the family. Any ghostly member of the family is able to use the shrine as a place in which to Slumber, and as long as the living family maintains a shrine, the wraith can continue to exist within the Shadowlands. However, a shrine is not an unresolved Fetter, and the wraith is free to travel out of the Yellow Springs to the Jade Palace or in search of P'eng Lai. After all, part of the family's duty to the dead is to aid them on their quest for Paradise. When the family offers particularly ardent prayers to the dead, they may succeed in calling a wraith to the shrine, much as if she had used the level four Argos ability Jump. This only takes place in times of grave need.

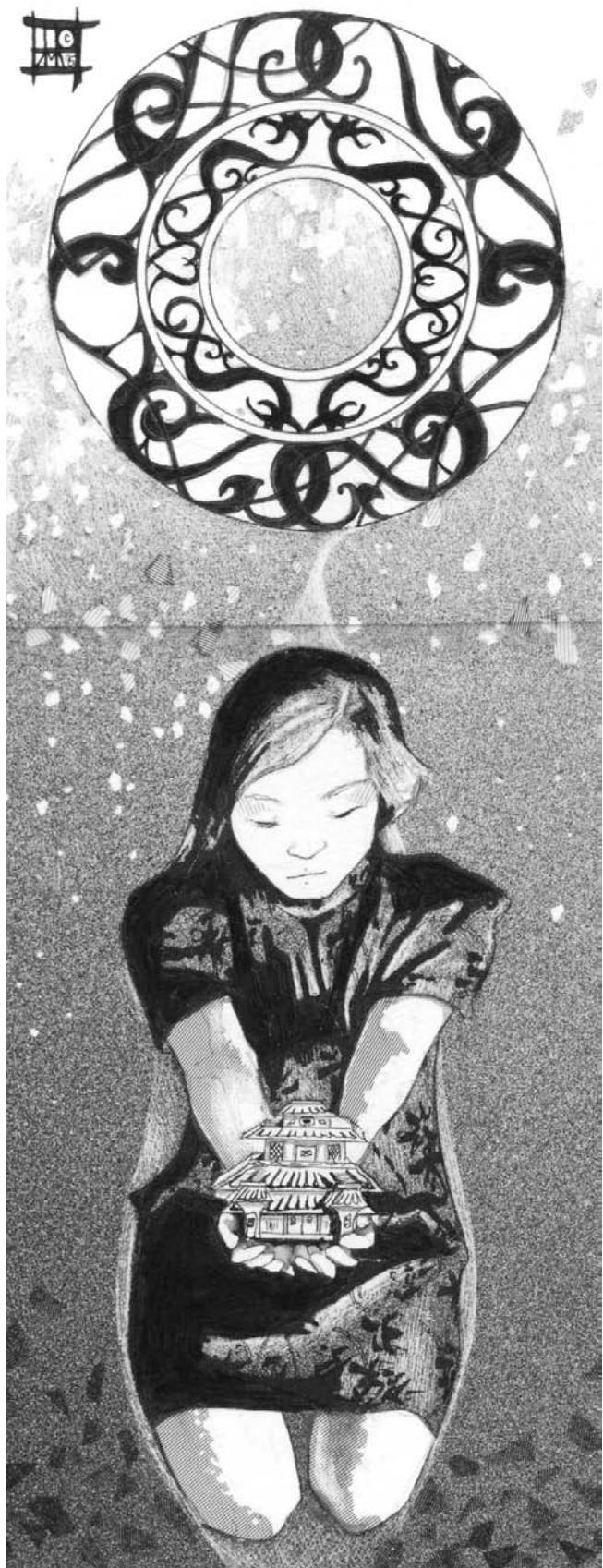
# Sacrifice

One of the most common ways for the living to honor their relatives is by offering them some sort of sacrifice.

Currency "minted in the Bank of Hell" (actually regular paper imprinted with these words) is burned for use by departed spirits in the next world. The cost of these "Hell notes" or "spirit money" to the family is negligible, as bundles of the cheap white paper bills can be bought in what is called a "paper shop" for pittance. When transferred to the underworld through their destruction, the relatives for whom they were intended can use the currency in their daily activities just as they would have in their lifetime, spending it on needed items and paying necessary duties. Censors will take Hell notes to cover taxes, and it is the preferred currency of bribes.

Rather than sacrificing actual items to the dead, a fantastic array of paper miniatures is offered to ancestors. On display during funerals and commemorative services are multi-story foil mansions replete with cars, servants, lawn furniture, televisions and rice pots. The houses are delicately assembled with bamboo splints and colored paper, some standing as high as five feet, with curved roofs and mirrored walls. This paper world is a unique art form, with skilled craftsmen able to produce surprisingly realistic but ephemeral settings which must be entirely burned to be properly "transferred" to the ghostly realm of needy spirits.

**System:** Sacrifices are a tangible benefit to the wraith in his death. Items that are buried with a wraith and given the proper ritual become relics in the afterlife. These are often items that were important to the individual in life, or items which will





be seen as useful. In the past, items included weapons, storage containers, tools, maps of the underworld (almost always wildly inaccurate) and personal items. Lately modern technological items have been buried, although these items are inoperable in the Yellow Springs unless fueled by Pathos.

Burned sacrifices are somewhat different. If the wraith is present when the sacrifice is made, he may immediately accept the sacrifice as pure Pathos, as the paper sacrifice does not become the item it represents. If Hell notes are the sacrifice, then a whole bundle of the bills is equal to one point of Pathos. If an item is sacrificed, then the size and intricacy determines the amount of Pathos it is worth. For example, a suit of clothes would be worth 1 Pathos, a car would yield 3, and a mansion would be worth 5.

If the wraith is not present when the sacrifice is made, the item appears in its original paper form before the wraith no matter where she is in the Underworld. The wraith may later convert the item into Pathos via the Arcanos Way of the Merchant, or enlisting the services of a wraith skilled in that Arcanos. The Pathos value of the item never changes, no matter how it is accessed.

## Funerals



Before there can be any thought of burial, several specialists have to be consulted. The religious authorities determine, according to the means of the family, the number of masses which must be sung to ensure an easy entrance into the Western heaven. Normally the virtues of the deceased are extolled, but should he have been a notorious villain, the services of the priests are devoted to putting up a plea in mitigation, and they implore the bad spirits to release the soul of their client.

A *feng shui* adept determines, from the horoscope of the departed, the most favorable site for interment. How "comfortable" a grave depends on whether the surrounding landscape is auspicious. Desirable attributes for a gravesite include a southern exposure, streams and rivers nearby and groves of trees, preferably cypresses and pines. The adept, a sort of landscape architect who selects the location sites by analyzing how they fit in with existing elements of nature, must determine whether the shape and height of the hills surrounding the grave will ensure the proper concentration of cosmic energy.

A medium is called in as well to consult the spirits of the tenants of the graveyard, and obtain their acquiescence to the proposed arrangements. As there is always a certain amount of lengthy, roundabout nature in the transaction of Chinese business, and it is essential to preserve the usual forms of po-

liteness, inquiries as to the comfort of the ancestors precede the request for their permission.

When the days set apart for the masses for the soul are ended, the family prepares paper offerings representing the objects with which the deceased was familiar in life. Servants (with names attached), carts or cars, horses and rickshaws are prepared for his use in the afterworld. Friends and relatives also contribute to the increase of his comfort and the enhancement of his importance in netherworld society. Before sundown on the eve of the funeral, these objects are taken into the street, or other open space, and are burned. An attendant beats them with a "wrong pole" to prevent the intrusion of wandering spirits who might misappropriate property which was not intended for their use.

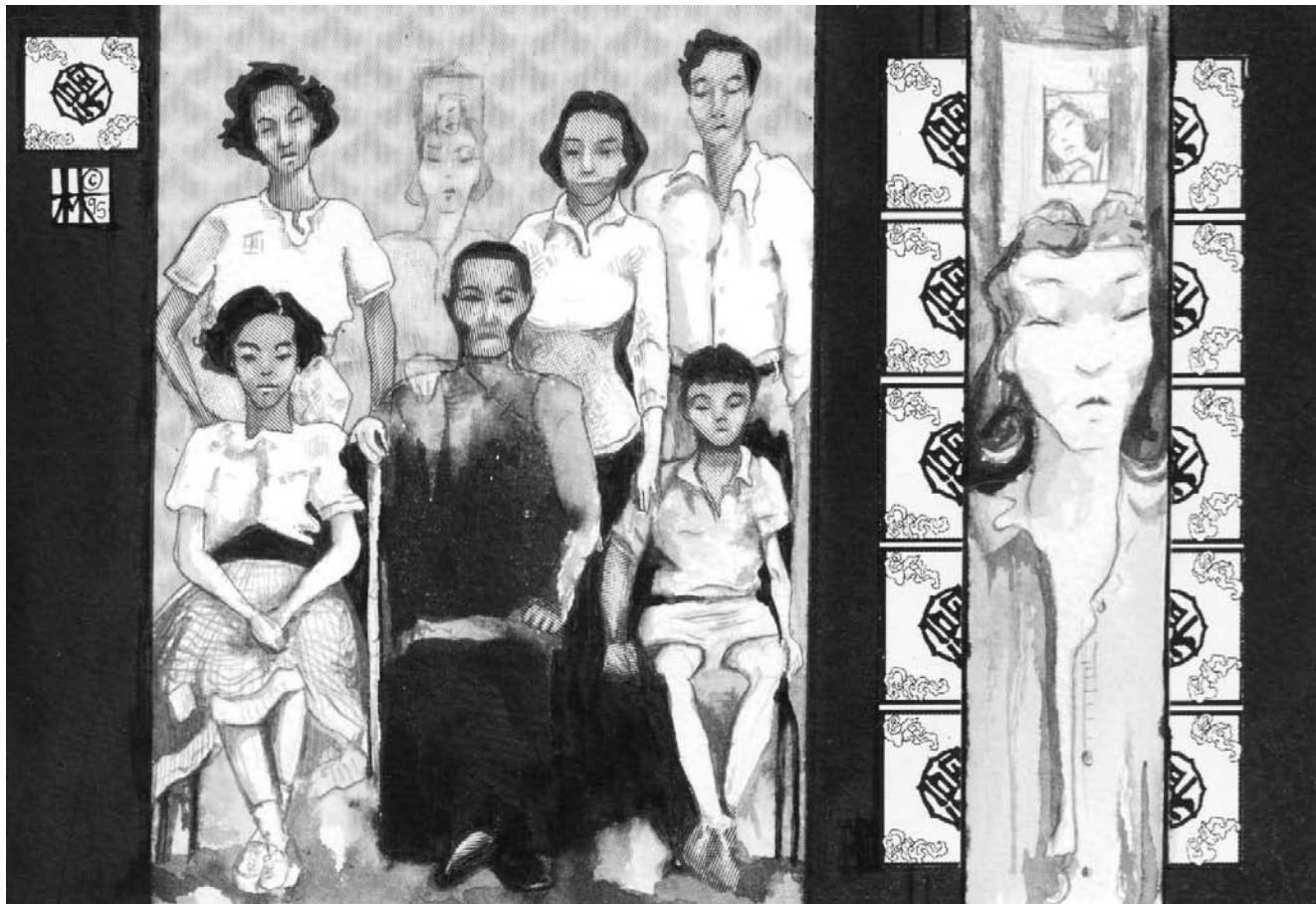
The bearers of the coffin are always in multiples of eight when a catafalque is used, the smallest number being 32 and the largest 80. The sedan-chair of the deceased is carried in front of the coffin, and his car or carriage also precedes it. The soul is supposed to ride in this, and is nowadays represented by a photograph.

In the funeral procession are men and boys carrying banners with eulogies of the deceased, umbrellas, lanterns, paper flowers and sometimes animals made of cypress twigs for burning at the grave. A noted general may even have a whole squadron of life-sized paper cavalry to escort him to the tomb. At intervals along the route, particularly at crossroads, Hell notes are flung into the air to distract malignant wandering spirits.

The men mourners walk immediately in front of the coffin, the eldest son being held under the arms by two of the other mourners to sustain him in his grief. Sometimes a white screen conceals him from the vulgar gaze. He carries in his hand a three-pronged banner bearing the name of the deceased. If there be a second son, he carries a small shrine with a paper tablet also inscribed with his father's name. These objects are burned at the graveside with the other articles borne in the procession.

On arrival at the cemetery, the coffin is lowered into the grave, and the *feng shui* diviner invites the relatives to satisfy themselves of its stability. The leader of the bearers gives a signal for the mourners to group themselves around the grave, where they prostrate themselves, while the band obliges with a dirge. Each member of the family contributes a handful of earth which is scattered on the coffin, and relatives and friends join in this last tribute to the dead. All weep and wail in taking leave of the deceased, while a bonfire of the paper articles is made at the graveside. As the flames die down, the mourners turn, and the ceremony is ended.

**System:** While not all of these procedures must be performed exactly, the more closely they are followed the less likely the deceased is to become a wraith or *kuei*. To determine if a funeral is performed properly, Perception + Etiquette is



rolled against a difficulty of 7. Any success indicates that the *hun* and *p'o* have separated properly, and no wraith is created. A failure indicates that the deceased becomes a wraith, while a botch produces a *kuei*.

## Festivals

*It's a dead man's party*

*Who could ask for more?*

— Oingo Boingo, “Dead Man’s Party”

**T**hroughout the year, people around the world reenact the rituals practiced by their ancestors. Whatever the culture, we still commemorate occasions in much the same way as in the ancient past through special costumes, makeup and ornamentation, enhancing the mood further by music, feasting and sharing. Celebrations and festivals are necessary for society and for the individual. They are about cultural identity, life transitions and personal discovery.

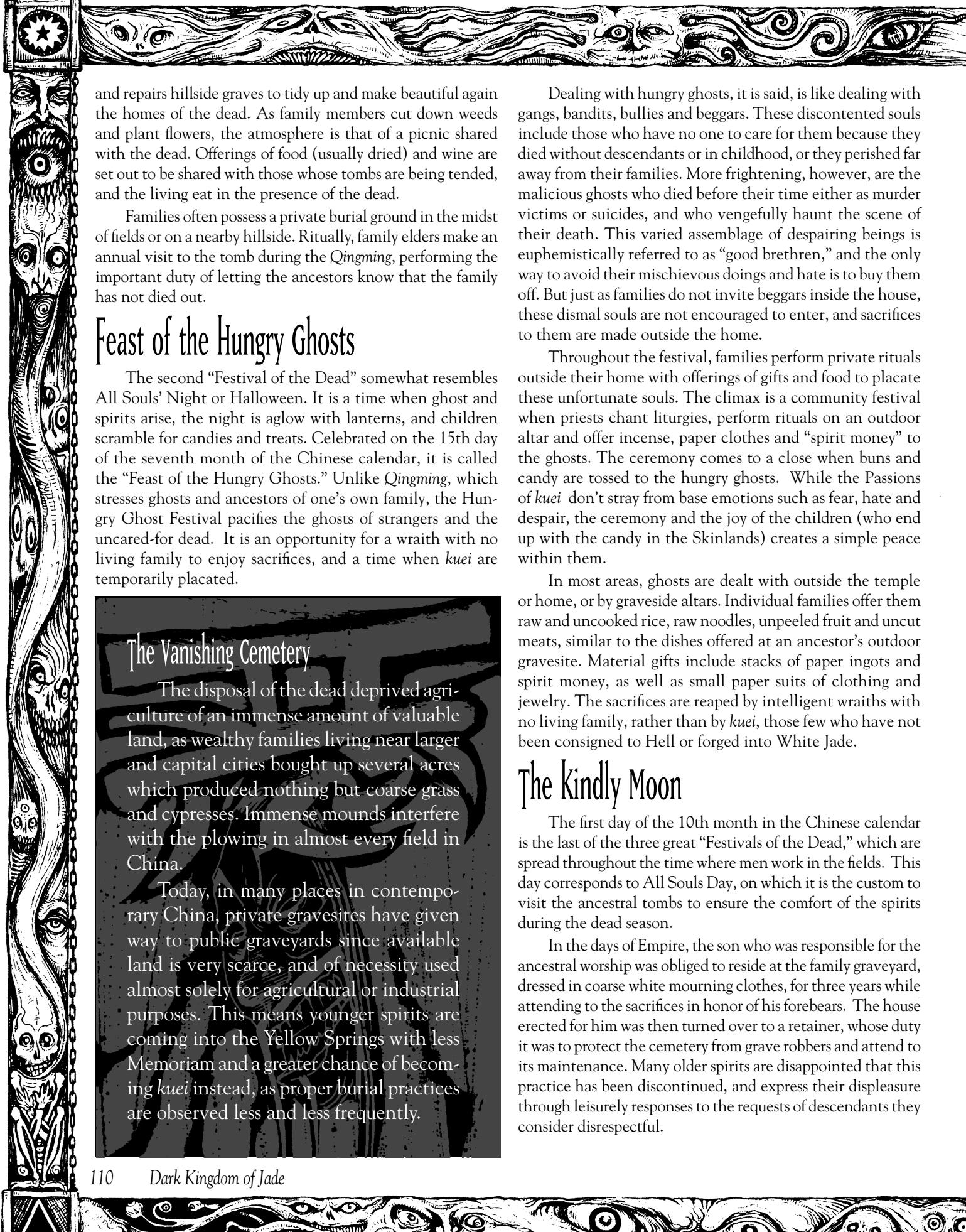
Festivals allow wraiths an excellent opportunity to gain Pathos through their Passions for their families, as emotions and hopes run high. When the family gathers, consideration is always given to the dead, as lost relatives are honored and welcomed by the living. The acts involved serve as additional Memoriam to a wraith, and physical sacrifices offer even further benefits to a revered ancestor.

The Chinese classify these events into two groups, “Festivals for the Living” and “Festivals for the Dead,” and both classes represent opportunities to the wraith. On the days of “Festivals for the Dead,” however, the Shroud weakens.

### Clear Brightness Festival

Once a celebration of fertility which originally had nothing to do with death, *Qingming* (literally, “Clear Brightness”) over the centuries became a “Festival for the Dead,” a time of quiet solitude and familial closeness to commemorate departed ancestral spirits. It is celebrated on or about April 5th, though the translation between Chinese and Gregorian calendars is not precise.

Today, *Qingming* is observed with ceremonial meals at the side of the family tomb, a distant salute to the uninhibited celebrations of former times. On this occasion the family cleans



and repairs hillside graves to tidy up and make beautiful again the homes of the dead. As family members cut down weeds and plant flowers, the atmosphere is that of a picnic shared with the dead. Offerings of food (usually dried) and wine are set out to be shared with those whose tombs are being tended, and the living eat in the presence of the dead.

Families often possess a private burial ground in the midst of fields or on a nearby hillside. Ritually, family elders make an annual visit to the tomb during the *Qingming*, performing the important duty of letting the ancestors know that the family has not died out.

## Feast of the Hungry Ghosts

The second "Festival of the Dead" somewhat resembles All Souls' Night or Halloween. It is a time when ghost and spirits arise, the night is aglow with lanterns, and children scramble for candies and treats. Celebrated on the 15th day of the seventh month of the Chinese calendar, it is called the "Feast of the Hungry Ghosts." Unlike *Qingming*, which stresses ghosts and ancestors of one's own family, the Hungry Ghost Festival pacifies the ghosts of strangers and the uncared-for dead. It is an opportunity for a wraith with no living family to enjoy sacrifices, and a time when *kuei* are temporarily placated.

### The Vanishing Cemetery

The disposal of the dead deprived agriculture of an immense amount of valuable land, as wealthy families living near larger and capital cities bought up several acres which produced nothing but coarse grass and cypresses. Immense mounds interfere with the plowing in almost every field in China.

Today, in many places in contemporary China, private gravesites have given way to public graveyards since available land is very scarce, and of necessity used almost solely for agricultural or industrial purposes. This means younger spirits are coming into the Yellow Springs with less Memoriam and a greater chance of becoming *kuei* instead, as proper burial practices are observed less and less frequently.

Dealing with hungry ghosts, it is said, is like dealing with gangs, bandits, bullies and beggars. These discontented souls include those who have no one to care for them because they died without descendants or in childhood, or they perished far away from their families. More frightening, however, are the malicious ghosts who died before their time either as murder victims or suicides, and who vengefully haunt the scene of their death. This varied assemblage of despairing beings is euphemistically referred to as "good brethren," and the only way to avoid their mischievous doings and hate is to buy them off. But just as families do not invite beggars inside the house, these dismal souls are not encouraged to enter, and sacrifices to them are made outside the home.

Throughout the festival, families perform private rituals outside their home with offerings of gifts and food to placate these unfortunate souls. The climax is a community festival when priests chant liturgies, perform rituals on an outdoor altar and offer incense, paper clothes and "spirit money" to the ghosts. The ceremony comes to a close when buns and candy are tossed to the hungry ghosts. While the Passions of *kuei* don't stray from base emotions such as fear, hate and despair, the ceremony and the joy of the children (who end up with the candy in the Skinlands) creates a simple peace within them.

In most areas, ghosts are dealt with outside the temple or home, or by graveside altars. Individual families offer them raw and uncooked rice, raw noodles, unpeeled fruit and uncut meats, similar to the dishes offered at an ancestor's outdoor gravesite. Material gifts include stacks of paper ingots and spirit money, as well as small paper suits of clothing and jewelry. The sacrifices are reaped by intelligent wraiths with no living family, rather than by *kuei*, those few who have not been consigned to Hell or forged into White Jade.

### The Kindly Moon

The first day of the 10th month in the Chinese calendar is the last of the three great "Festivals of the Dead," which are spread throughout the time where men work in the fields. This day corresponds to All Souls Day, on which it is the custom to visit the ancestral tombs to ensure the comfort of the spirits during the dead season.

In the days of Empire, the son who was responsible for the ancestral worship was obliged to reside at the family graveyard, dressed in coarse white mourning clothes, for three years while attending to the sacrifices in honor of his forebears. The house erected for him was then turned over to a retainer, whose duty it was to protect the cemetery from grave robbers and attend to its maintenance. Many older spirits are disappointed that this practice has been discontinued, and express their displeasure through leisurely responses to the requests of descendants they consider disrespectful.

Around this season, a special association known as the Society of Neglected Bones inspects isolated graveyards at this season, and advises relatives of the need for essential repairs. It also provides coffins and gravesites for the poor. Each member makes a certain monetary contribution, besides giving his personal services in tidying up neglected cemeteries.

Apart from the actual visit to the cemetery, All Souls Day is observed in the home by the ceremony of the "Burning of the Clothes." Even the dead are in need of warmer garments and other household necessities, so imitations of wadded garments and notes from the Bank of Hell are addressed to the spirits for whom they are intended. A deed is drawn up and signed in the presence of witnesses, stipulating that on its arrival in Hell, the sacrifice shall be handed over to the addressee. The deed contains a list of everything included and is burned along with them, so that the contributors have every confidence that their gifts will reach their proper destination. An extra parcel (known to the dead as "Censor's Portion") is made up to satisfy any hungry spirits who might intercept the bundle. Imperial Censors are extraordinarily busy at the end of this festival, and they will often draft regular citizens as temporary assistants to deal with the brief flood of relics. Of course, many of these items disappear, "lost through administrative error" in the midst of the deluge.

## Marriages Made in Heaven

In the past, there have been many occasions where the living and the dead have been wed. According to popular belief, such spirit unions occur because a girl who died in childhood decides some years later that she needs a husband to give her children. Her "children," the living man's offspring from a real marriage, are then obliged to worship the ghost as their mother, providing it with offerings as though she had actually married when alive. Such arranged spirit marriages assure that the dead girl's soul won't bring misfortune to her natal family or siblings' families, because she is now cared for and happy. Such a marriage also allows the bride's ancestral tablet to have a place of honor in her "husband's" household rather than a secluded position on her father's altar where she would be put if she had no descendants, which naturally bestows more Memoriam upon the wraith.

Sometimes the girl's spirit will alert her parents to her desire for marriage by appearing in a dream, or by causing some mysterious sickness that can't seem to be cured by ordinary methods. A spirit medium will then be consulted to diagnose the problem. When the family realizes the urgency of their daughter's request, they'll try anything to find her a husband. One cunning method for a speedy betrothal is to place a money purse containing the girl's name and horoscope on a road. The first unsuspecting male passerby, married or unmarried, to pick up the purse is designated



by the family as the dead girl's groom. Usually, the promise of a sizable dowry induces the man to agree to the marriage.

The marriage mimics an ordinary wedding in almost every detail, complete with a representation of a smiling bride. Engagement gifts consist of wedding cakes and money, and the dowry includes boxes of fabric, clothing and jewelry that the groom's living wife, if he is indeed married, can use. Feasts are held at the bride's home and the groom's home. On the day of the wedding, the dressed "bride" sits in the family room of her home with her back to the altar. Upon leaving, the bride's brother escorts her to the taxi-cab which takes her to the groom's house. The tablet is placed in a chair next to the groom during the feasting and is later placed in the bedroom on the wedding night. The next morning, it is positioned on the groom's family altar, its final resting place, where it will occupy a position of authority and respect for generations to come.

This custom has been reported as slowly dying out, but in some locations spirit marriages were still fairly common in the late 1960s and continue to be "celebrated," though less frequently than in the past.

There are other variations on the "Marriage Made in Heaven." There have been cases where weddings between two deceased persons have been celebrated. As is typical with how the Chinese living interact with the dead, the families concerned were left with no shadow of a doubt as to the supernatural influences which brought it about.

## Spirit Mediums

*You might call me a private eye, but your great-great-granddaddy might call me a shaman. From a certain point of view, I / do/ conjure up the dead, though there are times when I find myself believing that the spirits are conjuring /me/.*

— Norman Spinrad, *Deus X*

 In China, communication with the dead is still a live issue. Public opinion insists that the wishes of the dead, as spoken through the mouth of a medium, have the force of law.

Ancestor worship is so rooted in the Chinese culture that it is only natural that families should wish to consult the dead, whose spirits are always supposed to be hovering around the homestead. In times of difficulty, or when a decision is required, it is not unusual to call in a clairvoyant and take the course of action which she prescribes in the name of the departed.

### Clairvoyantes

The Chinese constantly consult the spirits of their ancestors when embarking on a new venture, such as opening a business or building a house. When the ancestral tablets are far removed from the home or otherwise unavailable, a

medium is used to obtain contact. A consultation with a clairvoyante (most tend to be women) is of no more moment than the purchase of a new umbrella, and the women do a roaring trade as the fee for a séance is such that even the common folk can afford one. No cheaper method could be devised for obtaining professional advice, which has a legal significance as far as public opinion is concerned.

Consulting mediums is more popular in the south than in the north of China, and there is usually a reluctance to employ the local practitioner who is certain to be informed of the family's affairs. Thus, when a household is in need of ancestral advice, a medium living in another village will be approached.

An unfamiliar clairvoyante is always tested by a question whose answer is known to her employers. If the correct response is given, confidence in her further utterances is established. This is the primary reason for hiring mediums from other villages, as it removes the possibility that the medium made an educated guess based on previous knowledge of the family. Once a clairvoyante has proven herself, she is likely to be called upon regularly in the manner similar to a family doctor.

If the ancestral tablets are unavailable to the medium, it is essential to know the location of the grave of the person with whom it is desired to communicate, and this becomes the site of the ceremony, rather than the traditional familial stead. It is of supreme importance that the clairvoyante earn the wraith's trust. There have been many cases of wraiths being contacted by mediums working for opposing families, who then tricked the spirits into revealing their family's plans.

Clairvoyants are temperamental, and may refuse to entertain a large crowd of relatives gathered for the performance. However, the Chinese people invariably feel the urge to cling together as a family. For example, if a relative is taken to a hospital for examination, he is accompanied by as many as the transport will admit, and usually more. Such is the case with consultation with the dead.

Mediums hold their séances during daylight hours. A table is transformed into an altar, with flowers, two candlesticks and a bowl of rice. The medium takes her place before this, seated on a stool. A few grains of rice are thrown in the direction of the member of the family to whom the deceased desires to make communication. Unlike with the practices of Western mediums, there appears to be no crystal ball or glittering object required by the clairvoyant to induce hypnosis. Some practitioners work themselves into frenzies or fall into trances before contact with the other world is established.

**System:** This sort of medium can speak with wraiths by tugging on their Fetters. A Charisma + Empathy roll (difficulty 6) is required, for the clairvoyante must win the spirit's trust before it will speak to her. The communication between the two takes place entirely in the Shadowlands (though the clairvoyante's body never leaves the Skinlands) and cannot be heard by anyone else in the room. Questions are phrased to the medium, who repeats them for the spirit. The wraith responds, and that answer is related by the clairvoyante.



## Street Mediums

Street mediums, sometimes known as spiritualists, are likely to be found in any given market or gathering place. Their devotions may be described as "public worship" in every sense of the word, for no form of audience troubles them in the least. A few are professionals, but the vast majority are amateurs who have no fixed fees, and give their services for so-called "lucky money," a percentage of which is always returned. In these street-side conversations with the dead, there is no hocus-pocus of a darkened room and soft music, but everything is done in broad daylight with the afternoon sun streaming down through holes in makeshift tents and tarps that are sometimes erected alongside each other.

These mediums have a particular knack for appearing attractive to those who use Puppetry. When dealing with a spiritualist, any wraith with even one level of Puppetry can use Master's Voice and take over the vocal chords of their hosts. Unlike clairvoyantes, spiritualists rarely have control over whom they speak to, or more accurately, who speaks through them. However, there is a generally friendly relationship between true spiritualists and the wraiths who use them. After all, the wraiths need a channel to their families, and have nothing to gain by abusing those who facilitate this communication.

Occasionally, a fraudulent medium will prey upon a family for his own gain, finding them easy prey due to their eagerness to believe. In such cases, wraiths who witness or otherwise learn of the event take matters into their own hands. Since the discovery of such frauds lessen the belief in mediums by the living, such occurrences pose a threat to one of the most convenient communication channels between the world of the living and the Yellow Springs. As such, a fraudulent medium will find himself haunted by many wraiths for months after he is discovered, forcing him to reconsider the gravity of his crime.

**System:** All rolls to use Puppetry on a spiritualist are at a -3 difficulty, because of the attunement of the medium to the energies of the Yellow Springs. As an additional side effect, spiritualists can never be conditioned into Consorts.

## Exorcists

Before medicine became an exact science, evil spirits shouldered the blame for illness, and the ministers of religion were appealed to for treatment rather than the general practitioner. Even in modern China, microbes mean nothing to many people, but devils and other foul spirits are lurking



everywhere. They are at their worst during the Chinese New Year, when respectable spirits rally to their homes and rejoin the family circle for the annual feast offered to them on the festive board. *Kuei*, who were cared for improperly after death, are found to be wandering everywhere in search of sustenance during this time, but are barred out from all homes by sealed doors and protective talismans.

The services of exorcists are in great demand at this season, and processions of priests in bright robes move through the streets to the discouragement of *kuei*, often taken by the living to be "demons." In houses that have been dogged by ill fortune throughout the year, special services are held, usually by a Taoist exorcist in a red robe and a black cap.

Exorcists are not tied down to a set form of ritual, and vary their methods to suit their clientele. Sometimes the doorsteps are sprinkled with the blood and feathers of a freshly killed cock, and a single demon may be disposed of by fixing a padlock round his neck. People are very tolerant about the methods employed. The central task is to stop the nuisance, and some families will try anything within their means, being totally indifferent if Buddhists, Taoists or both are employed.

As epidemics are attributed to the machinations of demons, the exorcists are kept busy during the "Dangerous" Fifth Moon, when the Chinese pray to the Taoist Ministry of Exorcisms to avert cholera and plague. This Medical Board has in its faculty seven chief ministers charged with expelling evil spirits from dwellings and generally counteracting their mischievous propensities.

Chang Tao-ling, the first Master of Heaven, is credited with being the originator of the doctrine which popularized the religion of Taoism itself, and with being no mean exorcist himself. He bequeathed his talents to his lineal descendants and successors in office, who wielded the *kuei*-dispelling sword and immobilized their adversaries by sealing them in jars.

This same sort of ceremonial sword used in the exorcism of a household is hung above the bed of a person suffering from nightmares, which are also thought to be caused by foul spirits. This sort of ritual is similar to that of a Warding, but a point of Willpower is not spent, and the effect is only that the use of Phantasm is impossible in the vicinity where the sword is hung.

Cats are credited with the power of scaring off evil spirits, probably because of their affinity to the tiger. The dog keeps human marauders from breaking in, while the cat expels any lurking "devils" who have entered unnoticed. Its powers of seeing in the dark enhance its skill as a night watchman, and allow it to sometimes look into the Yellow Springs to see wraiths. Upon seeing a wraith, a cat is likely to be "spooked" and attack at once, and no matter its size, it is easy enough for the solid creature to disrupt the Corpus of a wraith.

**System:** Exorcism techniques vary, depending upon what the exorcist is trying to accomplish and what sort of spirit they are attempting to dispel. At its simplest level, an exorcism is an extended contest of Willpower between the ghost and the exorcist. The ghost hunter may need to make various preparations or call out ritual chants in order to bring his will to bear on the troublesome spirit, but these are more psychologically than spiritually necessary. When the exorcist has achieved a number of successes equivalent to the target wraith's Willpower, it is considered banished and cannot return to the site. A botch removes one already achieved success, and if botches return the number of sustained successes to 0, the exorcism is considered to have failed.

An exorcist may attempt to gain an advantage over his opponent, by determining what is holding the ghost to the haunted place and turning his will to weakening that hold. A success on a Perception + Empathy roll (difficulty 7) will reveal a pertinent Fetter or Passion, and give the exorcist more of an idea of what he's up against. This gives the exorcist the advantage of one extra die in his pool for each Fetter or Passion uncovered.

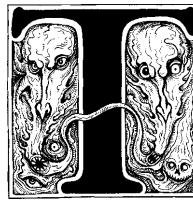
Of course, the wraith may attempt to distract the exorcist or defeat the attempt, either through the use of suitable Arcanoi (Pandemonium is a favorite), or by investing raw Pathos. Each Pathos point spent increases the exorcist's difficulty by 1. This can be used to defeat attempts to find Passions and Fetters, or against the ghost hunter's Willpower.

*Kuei* can be either easier or more difficult to dispel than wraiths, depending upon their connection to the household they are haunting. If a *kuei* has a Passion linking it to a house that has summoned an exorcist, the difficulty on all rolls to remove that hungry ghost is increased by 1. On the other hand, if the spirit has simply wandered in, the difficulty is reduced by 1.

Failed exorcisms have drastic effects, in both the Skinlands and the Yellow Springs. A bungled exorcism gives the target spirit two Pathos and three temporary Angst, and also instills ill will in them toward the living in the place. A ghost who is the subject of a failed exorcism also gains the 2 point Passion Take Revenge on Those Who Would Banish Her (Vengeance), and will bend her will to making their lives miserable. Also, those who fail in exorcisms acquire something of a psychic stench which attracts *kuei*. It is not uncommon for a failed exorcist to be followed home by a hungry ghost or three, eager to take vengeance on one who would banish them.

*Kuei* can also be destroyed by blood or saliva. However, this is a drastic tactic, and is rarely resorted to by professional exorcists. Furthermore, hungry ghosts are invisible, meaning that rarely does anyone have a notion as to where to direct the sacred fluids. The notion of a stranger randomly expectorating throughout the family home is not one that appeals to most people, no matter how troublesome their ghosts are.

# Charms and Talismans



The Chinese have probably retained more of their ancient beliefs than any other civilized race. Relics of the days when early man peopled stones, trees and brooks with kindly or malevolent spirits exist in all nations. In China, "deliver us from evil" is the watchword of nearly every section of the population, and a brisk trade in talismans is done, particularly by the Taoist clergy. In fact, popular Taoism derives a large part of its revenues from this source. As an abstract religion, it had little general appeal, as the average man had not the leisure to devote to his own perfection and the ultimate immortality. Chang Tao-ling, the original Master of Heaven and the first Taoist "Pope," brought religion to the common people by the invention of charms, originally incised on bamboo slips, but now always printed on paper or written on a scrap of silk. These ward off all evil influences, and keep malevolent spirits, both visible and invisible, at bay.

Along with day-to-day talismans, certain potent tokens are also available, though not readily. These are, for the most part, difficult to prepare, harder to obtain and valuable enough that most families will not be able to afford them. Even those that look to be made from common household items must be specially prepared. Identical-looking items can be made at home, but these rarely fool ghosts into thinking they're the real thing.

## • *Hu Hsin Ching*

Masters of *feng shui* use mirrors to drive off ghosts permanently. A portable version of the same equipment they use, the mirrors called *Hu Hsin Ching* (there are only a dozen in existence, and each is more than a thousand years old) drive off all spirits with remarkable efficiency. When the mirror is held up, any ghost seeing his reflection in it must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) or flee in panic. The Quick can also see ghosts' images in the mirror when they make a Perception + Empathy roll (difficulty 6).

## • The Blade of Coin

Made from bronze or copper coins strung together around an iron core, this talisman is especially useful in deterring unwanted spirit visitors known to the Quick. A Blade of Coin, hung over the bed the troublesome spirit used while living, can either resolve or destroy the Fetter which ties the wraith to the house. The Blade must hang there for a week, and at the end of that time the Blade's owner rolls Perception + Awareness (to resolve the Fetter) or Perception + Intimidation (to destroy it). Both rolls are made at a difficulty of 9. Curiously enough, though, the Blade of Coin is ineffective against *kuei*.

## • The Willow Sword

Really more a bundle of twigs than a true sword effigy, this mockup strikes wraiths as if it were True Jade. It must be specially



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prepared, however, and must be ritually burned with mugwort after one use. If not, the next time the sword's possessor attempts to use it, it will turn and strike him with full force instead.

#### • Five Poison Tincture

Made from grinding up the bodies of the Five Poisonous Animals (snake, scorpion, centipede, spider and toad) in liquor, Five Poison Tincture is a repugnant brew that can be found in bowls set aside for the poor outside the shops of rich merchants. While it fails miserably at its appointed task of curing rheumatism, it does, however, Ward off *kuei*.

#### • Dragon-Tiger Elixir

Made by the Master of Heaven, Chang T'ien Shih, from the spirits of the Five Poisonous Animals, this potent black brew is rarely found. It is of particular use against wraiths and *kuei*, allowing the imbiber to see them wherever they may hide. (Perception + Awareness, difficulty 5).

#### • The Jade Earring

A small ring of specially prepared jade, this prevents incursions by spirits, especially in children. Any child who wears a Jade Earring is considered to be Warded (See **Wraith: the Oblivion** for details). In adults, the effect of the Jade Earring is less, but it does serve to protect the living against Puppetry (+2 difficulty to Skinride).

## Fortune-Telling



desire to see the future seems inherent in the human race. China probably leads the world in ordering its life in accordance with the dictates of fortune. Even the dead cling to these practices, avoiding delicate tasks on unlucky days of the year, and soothsayers do a booming business in the Yellow Springs.

There are many methods of Chinese fortune-telling, but they aren't focused upon "seeing into the future." Instead, the key is to interpret the recent events in a person's life, to consider where she would like to take her life, and from this information determine the best course of action to reach that goal. No crystal balls or Tarot cards are used, only ancient wisdom passed down through generations.

**System:** Fortune-telling is a Talent, which can be learned by living and dead alike. It is a highly regarded profession, especially among the dead, and many prognosticators reside in Yu Huang's inner circle. Each fortune-teller must specialize in one of the traditional techniques, each of which offers a different perspective on the future. No one may specialize in more than one type of Fortune-telling, as each technique comes with a very specific take on the future. Trying to reconcile two or more simply leads to confusion and inaccurate predictions.



- **Novice:** Grandma taught you a few tricks.
- **Practiced:** You know when it's a good idea to stay home.
- **Competent:** You can open a shop and stay in business.
- **Expert:** Few secrets are hidden from your gaze.
- **Master:** Yu Huang has a question for you...

The number of successes rolled when one is attempting to read fortunes determines the clarity and accuracy of the reading. A botch gives an inaccurate reading, while a failure simply indicates that nothing can be determined.

The most common Specialties of Fortune-telling are:

## The Calendar

In China, every action permissible or forbidden is clearly laid down in the calendar for each day of the year. No one dreams of starting a business or repairing a house on one of the days unlucky for such enterprise. Even a visit to the barber on an unlucky day may entail a very unpleasant penance for a relative in the other world, who is condemned to drink dirty water for a month after her descendant has committed the indiscretion. Certain Censors

are assigned to watching the living for indiscretions of this sort, and the punishments are handed out frequently.

Those of the living with this skill have a detailed knowledge of which days are fortunate and unfortunate for any action one can name. This knowledge can often be used as leverage when dealing with the dead, as ancestors who have not repaid their families' devotion can be threatened with calendar-derived punishments. Wraiths with a good knowledge of the calendar serve to keep an eye on their living family, preventing inadvertent indiscretions and mistakes that would otherwise make life unpleasant for the dead.

**System:** Choosing a lucky day to begin an enterprise reduces the difficulty by 1 on all rolls related to that effort. Beginning on an unlucky day increases the difficulty of all rolls by 1, and any blunder that causes a dead relative to suffer increases the difficulty by 2.

## Astrology

The Chinese constellations are far more definite in their prognostications than those observed in the West. For example, the sign of the Swallow forbids any man to build a house, lest he

## The Earthly Branches

**Rat:** thrifty, quick-tempered, charming  
**lucky:** Dragon, Ox

**unlucky:** Horse, Ram

**Ox:** stubborn, patient, trusting, dependable

**lucky:** Rat, Snake

**unlucky:** Tiger, Dog

**Tiger:** sensitive, passionate, daring

**lucky:** Horse, Dog

**unlucky:** Ox, Snake

**Hare:** affectionate, cautious, good head for business

**lucky:** Ram, Dog

**unlucky:** Tiger, Horse

**Dragon:** full of vitality and strength, sets high standards

**lucky:** Monkey, Rat

**unlucky:** Dog, Hare

**Snake:** deep thinker, soft-spoken

**lucky:** Rooster, Ox

**unlucky:** Boar, Tiger

**Horse:** cheerful, perceptive, quick-witted, loves to be where the action is

**lucky:** Tiger, Ram

**unlucky:** Rat, Hare

**Ram:** strong beliefs, compassionate, accomplished in the arts

**lucky:** Hare, Horse

**unlucky:** Rat, Ox

**Monkey:** inventor, improviser

**lucky:** Dragon, Rat

**unlucky:** Tiger, Ox

**Rooster:** sharp and neat, extravagant in dress, prefers working alone

**lucky:** Ox, Snake

**unlucky:** Hare, Rat

**Dog:** loyal, trustworthy, faithful, makes a good but somewhat reluctant leader

**lucky:** Hare, Tiger

**unlucky:** Dragon, Ox

**Boar:** studious, well-informed, reliable

**lucky:** Ram, Tiger

**unlucky:** Snake, Boar

risk having a violent death in the family, suicide by hanging and the drowning of children under the age of three.

Fortune-tellers are always called upon for the three great events in life: birth, death and marriage. A new arrival in the world is invariably submitted to a professional, who casts his horoscope and predicts his future. No Chinese marriage can be arranged without the exchange of the data which enables an astrologer to determine the compatibility of the parties involved, and the disclosure of the time of birth is essential when consulting a fortune-teller.

Horoscopes are cast from the hour, day and year of birth, and the conjunction of stars at the time. Another method is the numeral system by which 785 is added to arbitrary numbers, and the corresponding characters are looked up in a key. These, when strung together, form a couplet which gives a clue to the client's fortune.

This method can be much more specific than any of the other methods of fortune-telling, but the couplets that are generated are often cryptic and make sense only in hindsight. Apart from the Calendar, it is the only technique which truly focuses in on individual events instead of vaster trends.

## Zodiacs

In Chinese fortune-telling, the 12 zodiacal animals are used to label each year in a sequence of 12 years, and the characteristics and promise of success associated with each sign make consulting one's animal forecast an enjoyable pastime of the New Year.

Chinese tradition holds that the birthsign affects personality strongly. Furthermore, actions taken in your "own year" are most likely to be fortunate; actions taken in "opposed" years are less fortunate, and people of "opposed"

signs may be bad luck. A ruler may favor one minister over others because of favorable astrological coincidences.

According to the rules of astrology, the 12 animals correspond to the 12 Earthly Branches. Five cycles of 12 years each make up one complete cycle of 60 years. The 60-year, or sexagenary cycle, forms the basis of the Chinese calendar. Turning 60 years of age is a cause for a major birthday celebration because the celebrant has thus completed one full cycle.

During the 60-year cycle, each animal sign or Earthly Branch is combined with the Five Elements (wood, fire, metal, water, earth) and each Heavenly Stem is associated with the Five Colors (azure, red, yellow, white, black). The Five Elements are further split into magnetic poles called the yin (associated with negative forces) and the yang (associated with the positive).

The cycle for recording years starts with the rat and follows with the ox, tiger, hare, dragon, snake, horse, ram, monkey, rooster, dog and boar. Lucky animals correspond to the years of birth of those with whom it is safe to associate. Unlucky ones should be avoided, especially in business partnerships and marriage.

The Zodiacal method of fortune-telling concentrates on the interpersonal. A specialist in this form is consulted

when one is about to enter into some great partnership or association. Use of the Zodiacial method can warn individuals about bad partners, unlucky marriages and businesses doomed to failure. It can also predict success and unity.

## Physiognomy

The Manual of Fortune-Telling by Physiognomy is used to assist those interested in reading their own fortunes by their features. This method involves analyzing a person's character by conformation of shape of the face, all parts of the body, and general posture to certain "archetypes." Both the living and the dead use this method of fortune-telling, to varying degrees of success. When used correctly, it offers some insight into what the individual being examined will be like in the near future. It can warn of approaching death much as Fatalism can, and can also give hints as to good fortune, bad luck or incipient injury.

The Manual divides the human race into 14 animal types. For example, the Dragon type has a long face with high-bridged nose and popping goldfish eyes which scintillate. These types are mere generalizations, used to sum up the subject at a glance, after which his character is assessed by a



detailed examination of his anatomy. Each feature plays a part to confirm or neutralize some other characteristic. Posture and movement are of the utmost importance, and a slouch can warn of coming ill-fortune.

This is a holistic approach to fortune-telling. It cannot warn against events, but can predict the effects of those events on the individual.

## *I Ching*

*I Ching* can be translated as *The Book of Changes*. Ideally, when the *I Ching* is cast, the participant meditates on a problem, a question, a concept or even nonverbal feeling, which she has considered at length previously. Involving the tossing of coins and yarrow sticks, the *I Ching* can be done in anywhere from 60 seconds to an hour and a half. Each toss produces a pattern corresponding to one of 64 possible hexagrams. The resulting hexagram is indexed to its appropriate reading and an interpretation, couched in metaphorical terms, is obtained. Ideally, the meaning of the hexagram will have the feeling that it has been on the tip of the tongue the whole time. However, if the matter has not been properly meditated upon, no wisdom

is to be gained, and simply guessing what a reading might mean and acting on it could prove disastrous.

The *I Ching* is more of an indicator of trends in the future than anything else. While a specific question or event is often the launching point for a cast, the response will be of a general, not specific, nature.

## *Feng Shui*

Not really fortune-telling, *feng shui* is also known as "Chinese geomancy." Literally meaning "wind and water," *feng shui* deals in terms of the influence of those factors. It is the art of adapting the residences of the living and dead, so as to cooperate and harmonize with the local currents of the cosmic breath. The shape and form of hills and watercourses are potent factors, but in addition, the height and form of buildings and the direction of roads must be taken into consideration.

*Feng shui* is essentially a personal doctrine, and sites which may be propitious for one individual may be inimical to another. In congested areas like Hong Kong, where there is little choice in the site of a new building, the professor must be called in to neutralize the adverse influences, as the power



## Unheeded Warnings

Unfortunately, the blueprints for Beijing's new 70-story Bank of China building in Hong Kong were not approved by *feng shui* masters. Its triangular construction with sharp edges, argued the geomancers, might slice through the cosmic balance of *yin-yang* forces and nick unheeding spirits. In the Yellow Springs where the building stands, several near-permanent nihilis have formed, and a series of Spectre assaults has erupted from these pits. Several of the Emperor's geomancers pointed to the disharmony of the structure as the reason for this incursion of Oblivion, now heavily guarded by a small squad of Guardsmen. Rumor has it that the Emperor, still fascinated by things magical, granted his *feng shui* experts permission to destroy the structure in the Skinlands. Even now, things begin to go wrong in the plumbing, the wiring and other, more vital systems.

to determine the initial layout is in other hands. The practice of *feng shui*, although officially condemned by the government of the People's Republic of China as "superstition," is widely adopted by architects, businessmen and the general public in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. It's not uncommon to

make a *feng shui* reading of the architectural plans any time a building is erected in these places.

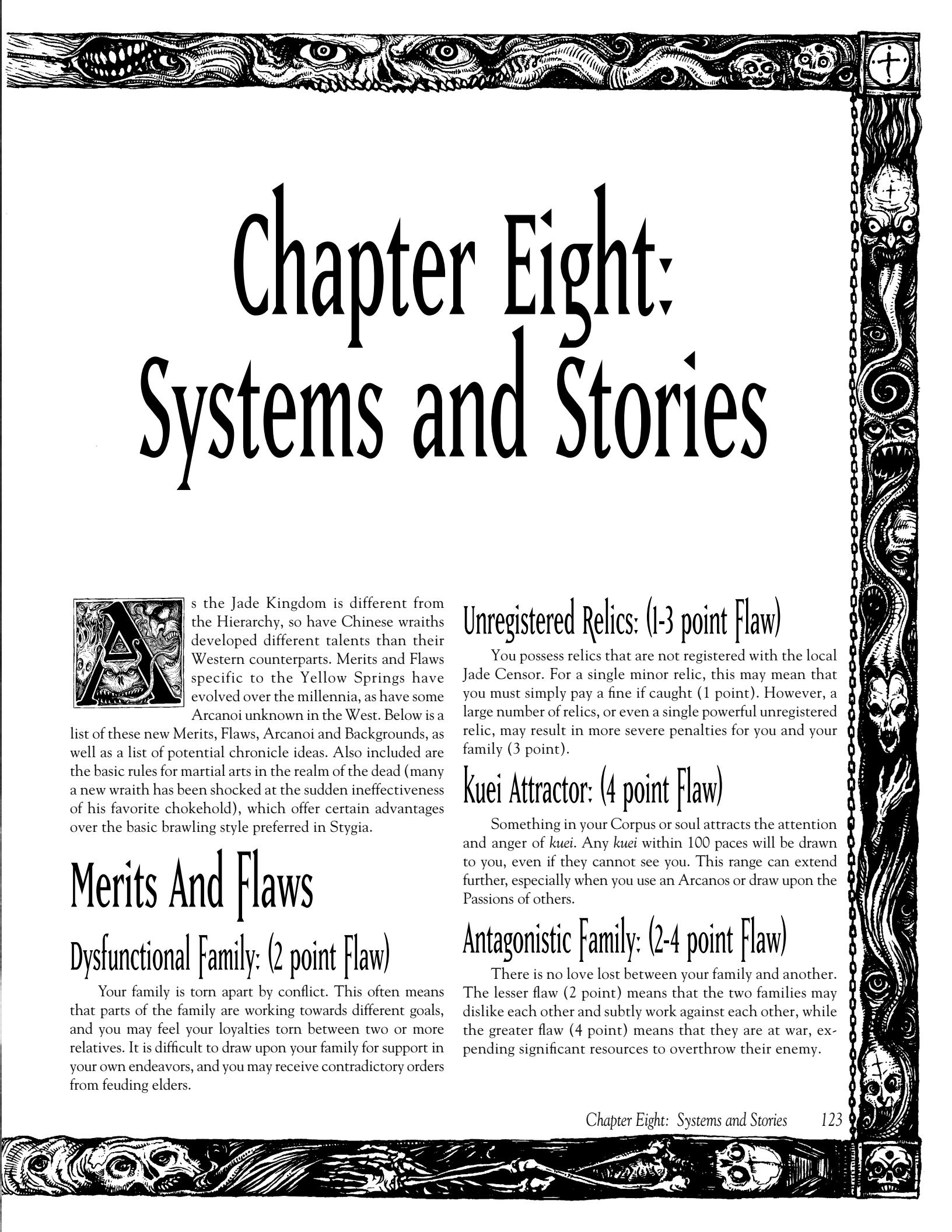
Although the disposal of the dead is the primary job of the *feng shui* practitioner, he must also be consulted in the selection of the site for a house or a temple. He may even be called in to modify the arrangement of an existing dwelling whose inhabitants have experienced some inconvenience. A bedroom may be changed to a sitting-room to suit the psyche of its occupant, or a partition may be erected to counteract some adverse influence.

However, it is not always possible to find an ideal site for construction, and in these cases the *feng shui* specialist must provide a remedy instead. As such, it is not uncommon to find houses, especially in urban areas, with mirrors lined up to deflect advancing *kuei* and protect the inhabitants from their evil designs. These mirrors, when arranged properly, have a remarkable effect on *kuei*. Any hungry ghost approaching a house warded by a *feng shui* expert must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8), or be driven away in pain. Of course, the mirrors drive off all spirits, not just malevolent ones. A wraith seeking entrance must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6), or be denied entrance in exactly the same way.

**System:** A *feng shui* practitioner, in order to set up suitable defenses against *kuei*, must roll Perception + Fortune-Telling. The strength of the infestation of hungry ghosts dictates the difficulty. One wandering hungry ghost makes for a difficulty of 4, while a hunting pack with Passions tied to the haunted house can be difficulty 8 or above to dispel.

When attempting to determine if a site or blueprint is favorable, the practitioner who is called in must roll Wits + Fortune-Telling (difficulty 7) to determine whether or not the chosen site is favorable. One success merely answers yes or no, while more successes will reveal what about the area is troubling and how it might be corrected.





# Chapter Eight: Systems and Stories



As the Jade Kingdom is different from the Hierarchy, so have Chinese wraiths developed different talents than their Western counterparts. Merits and Flaws specific to the Yellow Springs have evolved over the millennia, as have some Arcanoi unknown in the West. Below is a list of these new Merits, Flaws, Arcanoi and Backgrounds, as well as a list of potential chronicle ideas. Also included are the basic rules for martial arts in the realm of the dead (many a new wraith has been shocked at the sudden ineffectiveness of his favorite chokehold), which offer certain advantages over the basic brawling style preferred in Stygia.

## Merits And Flaws

### Dysfunctional Family: (2 point Flaw)

Your family is torn apart by conflict. This often means that parts of the family are working towards different goals, and you may feel your loyalties torn between two or more relatives. It is difficult to draw upon your family for support in your own endeavors, and you may receive contradictory orders from feuding elders.

### Unregistered Relics: (1-3 point Flaw)

You possess relics that are not registered with the local Jade Censor. For a single minor relic, this may mean that you must simply pay a fine if caught (1 point). However, a large number of relics, or even a single powerful unregistered relic, may result in more severe penalties for you and your family (3 point).

### Kuei Attractor: (4 point Flaw)

Something in your Corpus or soul attracts the attention and anger of *kuei*. Any *kuei* within 100 paces will be drawn to you, even if they cannot see you. This range can extend further, especially when you use an Arcanos or draw upon the Passions of others.

### Antagonistic Family: (2-4 point Flaw)

There is no love lost between your family and another. The lesser flaw (2 point) means that the two families may dislike each other and subtly work against each other, while the greater flaw (4 point) means that they are at war, expending significant resources to overthrow their enemy.

## Superstitious: (1-3 point Flaw)

The Chinese, both living and dead, are a superstitious people in general. Some ignore superstitions entirely, but many let them rule their lives. As such, there are penalties that follow the avoidance of bad luck. This Flaw can range from a simple compulsion (1 point) to a severe phobia (3 points) born of an old wives' tale. The effect can be anywhere between a quirk that requires you to use charms and talismans to a fully crippling psychosis that prevents you from going out on certain days of the year.

## Debt of Honor: (1-5 point Flaw)

You owe another wraith one or more favors, depending on the severity of the Flaw. If you fail to perform the favor when asked, you will lose a great deal of face within both your family and the community at large. The fact that you owe such a debt may be a secret, and if you fail to perform as requested, your secret will be revealed and your family disgraced. If the debt is public knowledge, then a failure to comply with your duty will likewise result in public humiliation. (1 point for a minor favor; 5 for a lifelong debt).

## Spirit of Healing: (3 point Merit)

You are a Spirit of Healing of the village you live near. Because of this, you have access to the pool of Memoriam they use, provided you give your fellow Spirits a noble reason for wanting to use it for personal purposes. However, membership in this group means that you must perform certain responsibilities.

## Eunuch: (3 point Merit)

You possess a Eunuch that can be used as you see fit, as a messenger, servant or storehouse of information. In order to change the function of the Eunuch, you must have access to both Moliate and the Way of the Scholar.

## Old Age: (2 point Merit)

You were an old man or woman when you died, and consequently are accorded more respect by those within your family, even those who are actually much older than you. Many will come to you for advice because of your extensive life experience. Even the heads of the family will respect your opinions more, merely because of your age. Lower the difficulty by two of any Social roll when dealing with members of your family.

## Favors: (1-5 point Merit)

Someone or some group owes you a favor. This individual may be merely a peasant, but could be someone as powerful as a magistrate at the commandery level or the head of a powerful family. Alternatively, someone of lesser power may owe you a series of favors. Discuss the exact nature of the debt with the Storyteller.

### Some Notes on Character Creation

Wraiths in the Jade Kingdom are similar, but not identical, to wraiths in the Shadowlands that Stygia controls. The substitution of the *p'o* for the Shadow is the biggest difference, but there are other, subtler ones. Most wraiths will have invested more time and energy into the native Arcanoi such as Way of the Scholar than ones like Inhabit (which is extraordinarily rare). Martial Arts is a more common Ability than Brawl, and Melee specializations are with traditional Eastern weapons. Living Family and Wraith Family are the two most common Backgrounds, and the wraith who takes neither is unlikely to survive for long. Certain Thorns, particularly Taint of Corruption and Death's Sigil, are rare outside of Hell, where they are looked upon as positive assets. Many Fetters deal with the living family or lack thereof, and a wraith in the Yellow Springs without a family Fetter is rare indeed.

On the whole, the basic character creation process is the same as that outlined in *Wraith: the Oblivion*. Characters have the same number of points to distribute, costs are identical, and the *p'o* is created in the same manner as the Shadow. It is simply suggested that players spend their points with the chronicle's unique setting in mind, and not give their characters Abilities, Backgrounds, Arcanoi or Fetters that are inappropriate.

# Skills

## Martial Arts

**T**he Chinese have practiced martial arts for thousands of years, and a myriad of different forms have developed over the course of time. Many wraiths in the Jade Kingdom are adept at these skills, either from their living days or from studying with a dead master. The Martial Arts Ability replaces the Talent Brawl. The martial artist must choose between a hard style and a soft style. Soft styles include: *Jujitsu*, *Shuai-Chiao*, *Taijiquan* and *Aikido*, while hard styles include: *Karate*, *Shaolin Kung Fu*, *Tae Kwon Do* and *Wushu*. For game purposes there is no difference between the various styles, but players are encouraged to choose one for purposes of characterization.

Soft and hard style martial artists have different difficulty ratings for the basic Brawl maneuvers:

**The Throw:** Having successfully grappled an opponent, the martial artist may attempt to throw him to the ground. This requires a Dexterity + Martial Arts roll, with a damage dice pool equal to the attacker's Strength. A successful throw can also stun an opponent, if three or more levels of damage are taken. Stunned characters are at -2 for all actions for a number of rounds equal to the number of levels of damage taken.

Additionally, for each dot after the first, the player may choose one of the special maneuvers for their style:

### Soft Styles:

**Counter Throw:** The martial artist uses the attacker's own momentum against him. The martial artist no longer needs to grapple an opponent before throwing him, instead making an opposed roll of Dexterity + Martial Arts against the attacker's Dexterity + Brawl, Melee or Martial Arts (whichever is currently appropriate). If the martial artist scores more successes, she has deflected the attack and may immediately attempt to throw the attacker.

	Soft	Hard
Strike	6	5
Kick	7	6
Grapple	5	6
Throw	6	7





**Joint Lock:** Having successfully grappled her opponent, a martial artist can damage or control him through applying pressure to his joints and pressure points. This often results in broken arms, legs and even necks. The martial artist rolls her Dexterity + Martial Arts to grapple, and then may immediately roll another Dexterity + Martial Arts to do damage. For each success scored, the martial artist causes one level of damage.

**Deflecting Block:** The martial artist concentrates completely on defense, trying to prevent her opponent from doing any damage and throwing him off-balance in the process. When blocking, the martial artist uses the attacker's momentum against him and redirects it, rolling Dexterity + Martial Arts (difficulty 6) against the opponent's attack roll. Each success subtracts one success from the opponent's roll. If the martial artist scores more successes than the attacker, the attacker must roll Dexterity or fall to the ground, taking his own Strength rating as damage.

## Hard Styles

**Elbow Strike:** A quick, vicious blow, usually delivered to the head at close range. Difficulty 5, Damage Strength +1

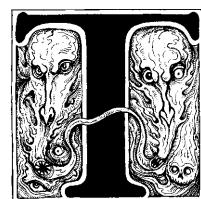
**Spinning Kick:** This fast, powerful kick does significant damage to opponents, and looks impressive as well. Difficulty 7, Damage Strength +2

**Blow to Pressure Point:** The martial artist learns to strike the pressure points and energy meridians in the body, causing significant damage. Difficulty 8, Damage Strength +3

**Damaging Block:** The martial artist's blocks are really strikes aimed at attacking limbs. Roll a normal Block roll, but if the artist scores three or more successes, she causes her Strength in damage.

# Backgrounds

## Living Family



This Background replaces Memoriam for most wraiths in the Jade Kingdom, although it is possible to have Memoriam in the form of offerings and remembrances outside of one's own kin. Widely known political figures, movie stars and writers may have a very high Memoriam but no living family to honor them properly. This Background does not let the wraith draw upon "emergency" Pathos, but rather represents how large and pious the wraith's living relatives are. The level of Living Family determines how often the living offer sacrifice and prayers to the dead. A large or pious family is likely to offer more to the wraith, but they are also more likely to call upon the dead in times of need.

- Occasional prayers are offered, but no sacrifices.
- Honored at major festivals with prayer and small sacrifices.
- Weekly prayers and significant sacrifices at festivals.
- Weekly prayers accompanied by small sacrifices throughout the year, and large gifts at festival times.
- Daily prayers and frequent sacrifices.

## Wraith Family

This Background represents the extent and power of the wraith's family in the Yellow Springs. This may be a traditional family or a Communist family, and is not directly tied to the number of living relatives. This Background encompasses the size of the entire family, including the different branches of the clan spread throughout the Jade Kingdom. The family serves as a network of contacts on which the player can draw for support and information. It also serves as a measure of an individual's stature in society. Members of large or powerful families are often respected, even if the individual has done nothing to earn that respect.

- Small Family, 3-5 members, restricted to one small area.
- 5-10 Family members, all residing in one area, or several small branches in different regions.
- Large local family of 10 or more members with branches in other regions of the Empire.
- Large family, with several large branches and many small branches throughout the Kingdom.
- Huge family consisting of hundreds of wraiths throughout the Jade Kingdom.

## Magisterial Office

You hold office in one of the Four Branches of Government. The cost varies according to the level of office held. With each of these offices comes obligations as well as powers, and players should consider carefully all the responsibilities of holding a magistracy.

- You are an assistant to the local magistrate, and may exert a small amount of influence upon him.
- You are an assistant to a city magistrate, and he often leaves minor details to you.
- You hold a local magisterial office, and have significant influence within your jurisdiction.
- You hold an office at the city or district level, and have a number of lesser magistrates under your authority.
- You have commandery responsibilities, and with hard work and dedication may catch the eye of the Emperor himself....

## Arcanoi



ll of the Arcanoi practiced in Stygia (except Castigate) are known in the Jade Kingdom, although not all of them are widely practiced. Instead of this Arcanos, Eastern wraiths have instead developed an Arcanos designed to deal with the inner conflict between *p'o* and *hun*. Inhabit is practiced by almost no one within the Jade Kingdom, although it is known to be used by some resistance movements in the Conquered Territories, particularly Japan. The tradition behind the Western Arcanos Usury is largely unknown as well, and those that do pursue this path usually practice it in secret.

There are several additional Arcanoi that are indigenous to the Jade Kingdom. The most common of these are the Four Ways of Confucius, a series of disciplines based on the four classical Confucian stations in society. Additionally, there is the Arcanos known as the Chains of the Emperor, practiced chiefly by the Immortal Guard, though rare others have been known to master this skill.

## The Way of the Scholar



tudents of the Way of the Scholar develop their *hun* until they become sensitive to others' psyches, and eventually are able to exert their will over others' minds. Many magistrates study this Arcanos, particularly the Judges and members of the Protectorate.

## Basic Ability

**Studious Nature:** The Way of the Scholar is a path of vigorous self-discipline and study. As such, all who follow it find learning other, less strenuous subjects to be easier, if not to master, then to learn.

**System:** All Knowledge rolls are made at a difficulty 1 lower than normal. In addition, Scholars may Specialize after one level of a Knowledge.

### • Discern the Lie

By attuning herself to the thought patterns of another wraith, the Scholar is able to tell if those speaking to her are deliberately lying.

**System:** This requires a Perception + Empathy roll, with a difficulty of 5 + the subject's Subterfuge. A botch produces an incorrect result, and is mortally embarrassing to the Scholar if later uncovered.

## • Inquiry

The Scholar can force the subject to answer a single question truthfully. The subject may express the truth however he wants, but cannot flat-out lie. In order to get accurate information, it is important for the Scholar to carefully consider his choice of words.

**System:** The Scholar makes a Manipulation + Intimidation roll (difficulty of the subject's Willpower). The more successes gained, the more complicated a question can be asked. Inquiry costs a Pathos point, but a botch drains another Pathos point as well as adding a level of temporary Angst.

## •• Word of Yu Huang

This power allows the Scholar to issue a single command to the subject. Again, wording is particularly important, as the subject is free to take advantage of any ambiguity in the order. Additionally, the subject cannot be ordered to perform any self-destructive act.

**System:** The Scholar makes a Manipulation + Leadership roll against a difficulty of the target's Willpower. The number of successes determines how complicated a command the Scholar may give. One success is a simple one word command, while five successes allows for orders up to a paragraph in length. However, the order must be given immediately, or the Word of Yu Huang fades and the Scholar is left with a resentful subject.

Word of Yu Huang costs one Pathos point per success gained. Each 1 rolled results in the acquisition of a temporary Angst point. Targets of Word of Yu Huang are generally not aware that they are being tampered with. The only time a victim of this Art can realize what is going on is when the initial command is fumbled (as above).

## •• Filial Duty

This is a more subtle use of the Scholar's abilities to influence an individual's *hun*. The Scholar manipulates the subject's mind in such a way that the subject willingly wishes to cooperate with the Scholar, as if the Scholar were a dear and honored member of his family. The subject cannot be forced to do things that directly contradict his previous convictions, but he will willingly help the Scholar in all other things.

**System:** The Scholar makes a Charisma + Expression roll against the subject's Willpower, and the subject will remain helpful to the Scholar based on the number of successes:

- One Success: One Hour
- Two Successes: Six Hours
- Three Successes: One Day
- Four Successes: One Week
- Five Successes: One Month.

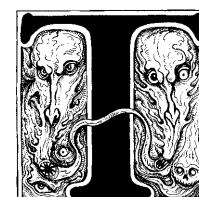
The use of this power costs three Pathos and a Willpower. Any botch creates an implacable enemy, and adds three Temporary Angst to the Scholar's pool. In addition, once Filial Duty wears off, the target becomes aware of what was done to her and generally will resent such treatment.

## •••• The Emperor's Servant

When the Scholar has mastered all the intricacies of manipulating the *hun*, she is able to fully control the minds of other wraiths. This ability allows the Scholar to implant permanent orders within the mind of a subject. It is through this power that Scholars help to create Eunuchs for the Imperial Government.

**System:** The action requires an entire day with the subject and the expenditure of 1 point of Willpower and 3 Pathos. The Scholar rolls Manipulation + Leadership against a difficulty of the subject's Willpower +2. The more successes gained, the more complex an order can be implanted. Again, no orders that are directly contrary to the wraith's personality may be successfully implanted. Botches cost the Scholar a Willpower point per botch, as well as giving them two points of temporary Angst.

# The Way of the Artisan



The Way of the Artisan teaches the methods of manipulating the various kinds of jade and relics found within the Jade Kingdom. By carefully working the material made from White Jade and True Jade, as well as relics, a skilled Artisan can create nearly anything. The Artisans realize that all substances in the Jade Kingdom are the souls of something from the living world. Even relics are simply the dead reflection of a living item, and once an Artisan fully comprehends the nature of an individual soul, he can begin to shape it to his will.

## Basic Abilities

**Hear Jade's Tale:** All who study the Way of the Artisan learn to discern the nature of an item in the Shadowlands, including any powers an Artifact may possess, as well the information about a soul before it was turned into White Jade.

**System:** A Perception + Investigation roll will reveal such information (difficulty 6).

## • Shape True Jade

True Jade is thought to be a portion of the Universe's soul in solid form. When True Jade comes into the Yellow Springs, only the Artisans know how to create new and powerful items with it. Given sufficient material and time, an Artisan can create any simple object.



**System:** To work with True Jade, the Artisan rolls Wits + Expression (difficulty 6). The complexity of the object being made determines the number of successes needed. A botch ruins the True Jade, and it cannot be used for anything else.

### •• Work White Jade

Once a human soul has been transformed into White Jade, the Artisan is able to manipulate the substance much like she can manipulate True Jade. However, White Jade does not have the same strength and malleability as True Jade, and it takes three times as much White Jade as True Jade to make any given object. This skill also allows an Artisan to work with the Corpus of a *kuei* after it has been prepared by a Farmer.

**System:** Identical to **Shape True Jade**, with the same result for a botch.

### ••• Rework Relics

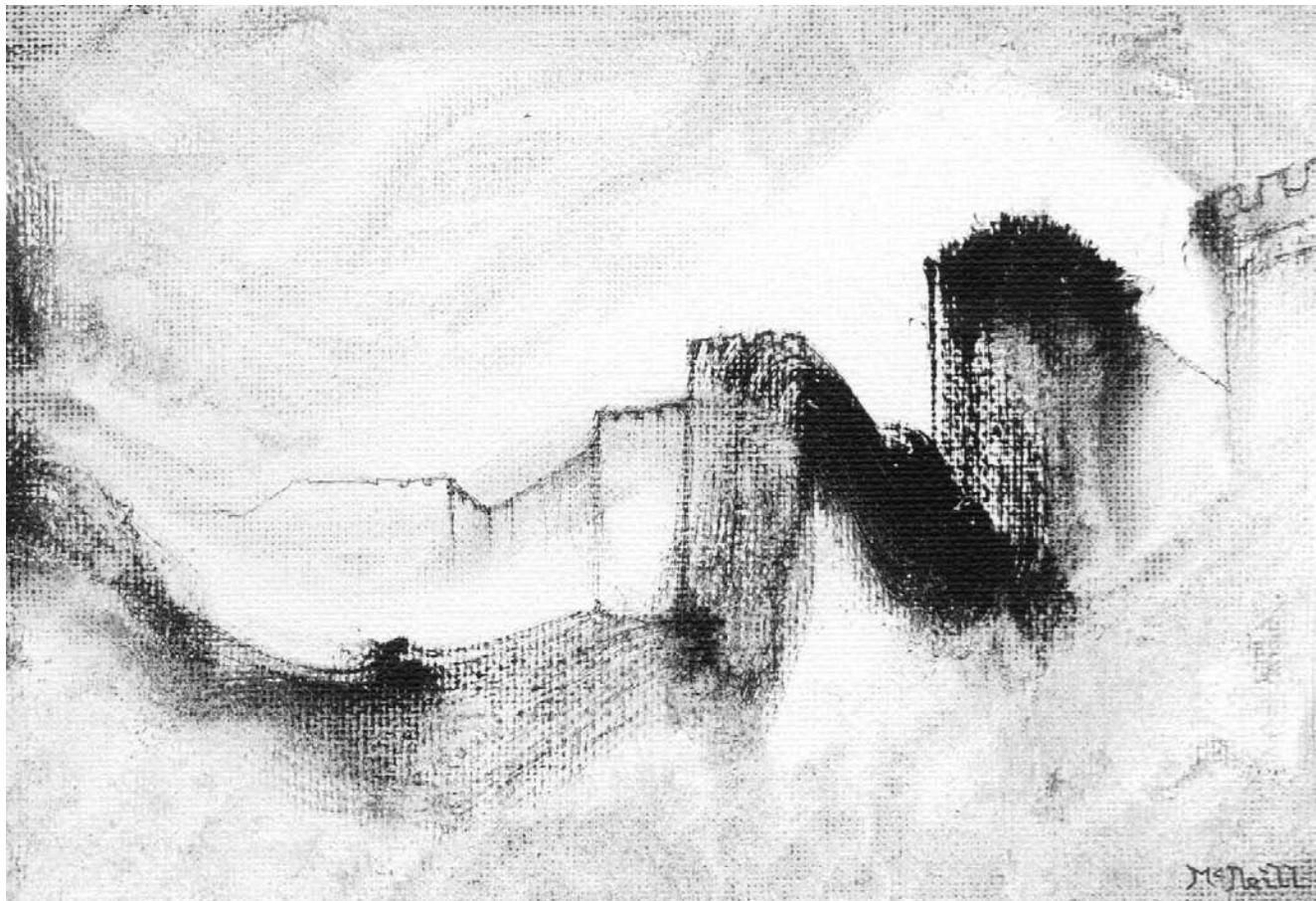
With this power, the Artisan has become skilled enough to manipulate objects crafted from things other than souls. The Artisan can change the form of a relic, and possibly even the nature of the material itself, although this is very difficult.

**System:** The Artisan rolls Dexterity + Way of the Artisan against a difficulty of 7 to change a relic's form. To modify the material the relic is made from requires three successes on the same roll against a difficulty of 8. A botch indicates that the relic has been ruined beyond repair, and has lost its original abilities.

### ••• Empower Jade

The Artisan has now learned how to awaken the soul within True Jade, and to a lesser extent, White Jade as well. The Artisan can now imbue jade items with Pathos and even with other Arcanoi that she possesses. Any jade item may be used to store the powers of a single Arcanos, as well as the Pathos necessary to empower the object. Without the aid of one skilled in the Way of the Merchant, the Artisan may only imbue the item with her own Pathos and Arcanoi.

**System:** This action requires a Wits + Crafts roll and the expenditure of three Pathos points in addition to whatever Pathos is stored within the item. True Jade items are more easily created (difficulty 5), and can retain their powers indefinitely, while items made from White Jade (difficulty 7) usually lose their abilities after a number of months equal to the Artisan's successes. A botch drains the Artisan of twice as many Pathos as she had intended to invest in the object, and adds an Angst point.



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## ..... Create White Jade

The Artisan has reached her greatest potential, and is now able to create White Jade from captive souls. Before a soul can be transformed into White Jade, it must first have its will and spirit broken (Willpower and Pathos ratings of 0). Then, over a period of three days, the Artisan works the Corpus of the soul into White Jade.

**System:** Making White Jade requires a Manipulation + Crafts roll, difficulty 6. When the Artisan accumulates 10 successes (over a game period of three days — even if the successes are gained immediately, the time must be invested) she has fully transformed the Corpus into White Jade. The process yields approximately three pounds per level of Corpus forged.

The Artisan must decide the general nature of the jade she is creating before the process begins, choosing between hard and soft jade. Hard jade is suitable for items such as weapons, containers and armor while soft jade is more suitable for parchment, furniture and even clothing. A botch while making White Jade can be truly horrific, for it energizes the Corpus being worked and allows it to turn immediately into a *kuei*.

## The Way of the Farmer



While the Scholar learns to influence the *hun*, the Farmer perfects the cultivation of the *p'o*. Where Scholars skillfully use language and their minds to manipulate the intellect, the Farmers use fear and intimidation to harness untamed souls. There are several similarities between Farmers and Pardoners, but Farmers concentrate solely on the *p'o* in others. Farmers are also particularly adept at controlling and reaping *kuei*, which are simply *p'o* without *hun*.

### Basic Abilities

**Kuei Howl:** Farmers can call out to *kuei*, imitating their voice so that any hungry ghost within hearing will think that it is another of their kind howling. This trick is also useful for distracting other wraiths, and many of the rebel movements communicate in the field by means of *Kuei Howls*.

**System:** Making the *Kuei* Howl requires a Manipulation + Expression roll (difficulty 6). A successful howl can be heard for 100 yards in the Shadowlands. Botching a howl will instead infuriate all *kuei* within earshot, who will immediately close and attack the Farmer.

## • Finding the Hidden Ghost

The Farmer's crop does not grow in fields. It hides in the souls of wraiths and in the darkest corners of the Yellow Springs. This ability allows the Farmer to sense the location of *kuei* and those wraiths who are being controlled by their *p'o*.

**System:** Each success on a Perception + Investigation roll (difficulty 6) extends the wraiths senses by 15 yards. The Farmer knows the location of every being within the sphere dominated by its *p'o*. This includes *kuei*, Spectres and wraiths dominated by their wilder half. Botches give the Farmer inaccurate information, generally causing him to miss one or more spirits he would normally have located.

## • Cowing the Bestial Spirit

The Farmer has learned to induce fear in wild souls and hungry ghosts. By speaking forcefully and threatening, the farmer can frighten any *kuei* or other wild soul into not attacking or even complete obedience.

**System:** A Charisma + Intimidation roll (difficulty 7) determines how successful she is. The effects last 10 minutes per success rolled.

One: The subject flees in terror.

Two: The subject cannot advance towards the Farmer, and may only retreat slowly.

Three: The subject is frozen in place.

Four: The Farmer may render the subject "unconscious."

Five: The Farmer can control the subject's movements.

Botches cause the target to attack immediately, as well as giving the Farmer a temporary Angst point.

## • Purify

This has the same effect on the *p'o* that the level 3 Castigate power Purify. It reduces the temporary Angst pool of the ravening *p'o*, though it has no effect on permanent Angst.

**System:** The Storyteller makes a roll of the Farmer's Charisma + Way of the Farmer against the permanent Angst score of the subject. Each success removes a temporary Angst and a Corpus level from the target, while any 1 rolled gives a point of temporary Angst to the Farmer. A point of Willpower can be used to aid the process.

## ••• Deaden Spirit

*Kuei*, Spectres and *p'o*-controlled wraiths are all creatures of passion, fueled by their anger, jealousy and hatred. In order

to master such a beast, one must tame it. The Farmer mollifies his target through soothing words.

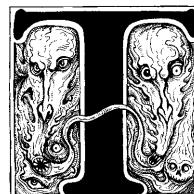
**System:** By rolling Charisma + Empathy, (difficulty 8) the Farmer mollifies the beast, deadening its emotions. The target will not take any violent or even sudden actions for a period of one round per success scored. It may wander about listlessly, or mutter insults under its breath, but it has no energy for anything more than this. A botch causes the target to attack and the Farmer to gain three temporary Angst points.

## •••• Reap the Hungry Ghost

The Farmer has now reached the height of her craft, and may collect the Corpora of *kuei* as if they were bushels of rice. This art only works on *kuei* that have been subdued, and preferably deadened. It does not work on *kuei* that are leaping to the attack, and is totally ineffective on spectres and wraiths under the control of their *p'o*.

**System:** Reaping a hungry ghost is simpler than creating White Jade from a wraith. By manipulating the *kuei*'s Corpus, the Farmer can distill it down to a blob of clayey material that can be easily transported or stored. A Manipulation + Crafts roll is required (difficulty 7), as well as two points of Pathos and the investment of half an hour per Corpus level harvested. Any 1 rolled ruins one Corpus point's worth of *kuei*, as well as giving the Farmer a temporary Angst point.

# The Way of the Merchant



he Merchant serves as a middleman in the Middle Kingdom. Many look down on the Merchants, individuals who produce nothing and yet become wealthy off the skills of others. Nevertheless, the Way of the Merchant is a valuable art, and every citizen of the Jade Kingdom must have access to a Merchant in order to use the sacrifices their living relatives give them.

## Basic Abilities

**Jingle Jingle:** All Merchants can literally smell money around them. They have the ability to detect any Pathos stored in solid form by use of the Mint Money art, and their range extends 20 feet in all directions. This is useful in avoiding robberies, as more than one well-heeled bandit has found that his carefully laid plans were betrayed by the coins in his pockets.

**System:** A Perception + Way of the Merchant roll is required to use Jingle Jingle. Wraiths who botch this roll are convinced that money is nearby when there is none, and are



prone to get angry if they cannot find it. They also add one temporary Angst point.

## • Transfer

This functions in a fashion similar to that of the Usury power of the same name. Merchants may lend their Pathos to another wraith or take it from them as desired. Use of Transfer provides a yellowish glow around the point where the Merchant and her target are touching, as this power only works through Corpus-to Corpus contact.

**System:** The Merchant rolls Manipulation + Way of the Merchant to perform a Transfer. When giving another wraith Pathos, the difficulty is the target's current Pathos. A Pathos theft is done at a difficulty of the target's Willpower. The number of successes rolled is the number of Pathos points that can be transferred, but each botch gives the Merchant a temporary Angst point instead. To Transfer costs 1 Willpower point.

## •• Cash Money

This is the most commonly used ability of the Merchant, and many wraiths go no further in their studies of Way of the Merchant. Cash Money allows the wraith to take full advantage of the sacrifices offered by living relatives. The Merchant may convert the sacrifice directly into Pathos, which he may then keep or transfer into other wraiths.

**System:** Cash Money is a two step process. To convert a sacrifice into Pathos requires a Manipulation + Way of the Merchant roll against a difficulty of the amount of Pathos within the sacrifice. Once this is done, Transfer can be used to share Pathos with other wraiths. Botches cause the loss of Pathos points equal to the number of ones rolled.

## ••• Withdraw Essence

The Merchant may obtain Pathos from the Corpus of a *kuei* that has been converted by a Farmer or from raw White Jade. Shaped White Jade cannot be used for this, nor can *kuei* that have been hammered into a new form.

**System:** The Merchant rolls Manipulation + Way of the Merchant against a difficulty of 5 + the number of Pathos points to be gained. Thus an attempt to gain 1 point of Pathos would have a difficulty of 6, 2 points would be at a difficulty of 7, etc. A Willpower point is necessary to Withdraw Essence, and each botch adds a point of temporary Angst.

## ••• Returning the Favor

This ability lets the Merchant aid her living relatives much in the same way that they aid her. The Merchant may imbue a mortal with Pathos, giving them a boost of emotional energy. The results of Returning the Favor vary, depending upon how much Pathos was given.

One point will allow a mortal to reduce the difficulty of a single action by one.

Two points will allow the mortal to re-roll a failed dice roll. Three points of Pathos will restore a point of Willpower. No more than 3 points can be Returned at any given time.

**System:** To Return the Favor, the wraith need not manifest herself, although her Corpus must be within five feet of the subject. The ability requires the expenditure of one Pathos, one Willpower and a roll of Charisma + Empathy (difficulty equal to the number of Pathos transferred + 4). A botch means the Pathos is wasted, and the wraith gains a number of temporary Angst points equivalent to the number of Pathos she was attempting to Return.

## •••• Mint Money

With Mint Money, the Merchant is able to turn his Pathos into a physical form that can be transferred easily. Most Merchants create coin strings or wads of paper money, although more exotic tokens are possible. Some Merchants prefer to create unique "moneys" that serve as their personal signature, and thus achieve some personal notoriety.

**System:** Performing this feat requires a Manipulation + Merchant Roll, with a difficulty equal to the amount of Pathos converted + 4. The newly minted currency is not permanent, lasting 24 hours per success. To use this Art costs two Pathos and a Willpower, and any botch gives the Merchant 2 temporary Angst points for each point of Pathos he attempts to convert.

# The Way of the Soul



While the other four Arcanoi indigenous to the Jade Kingdom find their roots in Confucian teachings, the Way of the Soul draws upon Taoist beliefs. Where Stygians look to Castigators to help them deal with their troubled souls, denizens of the Jade Kingdom turn within, preferring to fight their own demons rather than be at the mercy of someone else. Few followers of this path are able to influence the *p'o* in other souls, but they can gain amazing mastery over their own divided self.

## Basic Ability

**Negotiation:** Those who know the Way of the Soul achieve a greater understanding of their own *p'o* than most wraiths, and included in that understanding is a grasp of how to calm the *p'o*'s anger. Practitioners of the Way of the Soul

(sometimes called Doctors) are sometimes able to convince their *p'o* not to assert itself and dominate their actions. It is a risky action to take, as the *p'o* is easily angered, and if the attempt fails the *p'o* will press its claim all the more violently for having been delayed.

**System:** When a practitioner of Way of the Soul feels that her *p'o* is about to take control of her Psyche, she may invoke Negotiation. The player makes a Willpower roll (difficulty 9) to convince the *p'o* that it would rather remain quiescent for the time being. A success indicates that the *p'o* loses one point of temporary Angst and does not attempt to seize control; a failure indicates that the *p'o* makes its Catharsis roll at a difficulty of 5. A botch on an attempted use of Negotiation gives the *p'o* immediate control of the wraith.

A Doctor is not obligated to utilize Negotiation. The threat of its use is an effective tool in dealing with a recalcitrant *p'o*, and many Doctors come to early accommodations with their darker sides on limits to its degradations. Negotiation is a double-edged sword, and neither the *p'o* nor the Doctor is generally willing to risk its consequences.

### • Coax

Coax functions identically to the Castigate power of the same name. It allows the wraith to modify the number of Shadow Dice its *p'o* offers, thus allowing the wraith to minimize certain risks taken when dealing with one's dark side.

**System:** To use Coax, the wraith must roll of Charisma + the Way of the Soul against a difficulty of 6. Each success allows another die to be removed from or added to the Shadow Dice pool. Use of Coax adds one temporary Angst point.

### • Nullify Thorns

The wraith is able to temporarily prevent her *p'o* from using one of its Thorns.

**System:** By expending a point of Pathos and making a contested roll of a wraith's Stamina + Meditation against her Angst, the wraith can prevent the use of a single Thorn for one half hour per success. A botch means that the *p'o* gains a point of Angst.

### • Give Higher Passions

The wraith may now try to temporarily induce some of his own Passions into the *p'o*, temporarily replacing one of its Dark Passions.

**System:** This requires a Manipulation + Meditation roll against a difficulty of the Angst of the *p'o* + 2. Each success means the *p'o* possesses the new Passion for one day in lieu of a Dark Passion chosen by the wraith. This costs two Pathos to perform, and a botch results in the player gaining two temporary Angst.





### .... Alter Demeanor

The wraith has attained such a level of influence over her *p'o* that she is actually able to alter its Archetype for extended periods of time. The wraith may force the *p'o* to take on any new Archetype, even those that are normally reserved for the *hun*. The wraith is in essence, elevating her *p'o*, convincing it to care about higher things such as love and accomplishment instead of just hatred and jealousy.

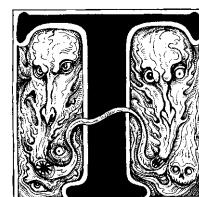
**System:** This requires a Charisma + Manipulation roll against a difficulty of the *p'o*'s Angst + 4. The effect lasts for one week per success, but if the player botches, then the *p'o* gains 4 temporary Angst and one permanent. Even if the player merely fails without botching, she still gains one Angst. This Art costs three Pathos.

### .... Inner Peace

This is similar to the Level Five Castigate power Defiance. Instead of standing against the *p'o* when it seeks to assert itself, the wraith joins with it and for a time the two may act as one, just as they did when alive. Often the *p'o* will be reluctant to assert itself for days after a use of Inner Peace.

**System:** If the wraith overcomes his *p'o* in an opposed roll of his willpower against its Angst, the two may act in tandem. The player gains Pathos from both his Dark Passions and his *hun*'s Passions and may use both his own Arcanos and the *p'o*'s Thorns, drawing upon both his temporary Angst and his Pathos. This wraith is not fully in control of himself during this time, but neither is the *p'o*. The period of joining ends when all of the *p'o*'s temporary Angst has been expended. A botch gives the *p'o* immediate control and three points of temporary Angst.

## Chains of the Emperor



The most potent weapon in the arsenal of the Immortal Guard is their own Arcanos: Chains of the Emperor. Designed by Fu Xia and the Emperor to immobilize, not kill, Chains of the Emperor is extraordinarily effective at subduing wraiths, *kuei* and even Spectres. In theory, only members of the Immortal Guard have been trained in the Chains of the Emperor. However, one or two of the assassins trained by the mage Apina demonstrated abilities suspiciously like Soul Anchor during the Third Great Revolt before being hunted down and destroyed.

## Basic Abilities

**Soul Anchor:** At a basic level, Chains of the Emperor is directly opposed to Argos. The use of Soul Anchor makes any Guardsman able to detect the use of Argos within fifty feet of him.

**System:** A Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7) will reveal the general location of an individual hidden by Enshroud. The same roll (difficulty 5) serves to detect any uses of Argos at all within a 50 foot range.

### • Brilliance

The Guardsman's painted skin glows even brighter than normal when Brilliance is invoked. The magically enhanced paint on the Guardsman's skin glows in eerily bright colors, piercing the eternal night of the Shadowlands with the hues of a bizarre sunset.

**System:** This process takes three turns to reach full brightness. At their full brilliance, the colors blind all those near the Guardsman who do not make a Stamina roll (difficulty 7). Attacks against the Guard when Brilliance has been activated have their difficulty increased by one for the first two rounds the Art is in play, and by two for each consecutive round after that. It costs one Pathos to use Brilliance for five rounds, and a botch blinds the Guardsman for one round per botch.

### • Shackles

Using some of his own Corpus, the Guardsman can create a pair of shackles with which he may bind either the hands or feet of an opponent who has already been immobilized. These cannot be removed by anyone but a Guardsman unless rent through the use of Moliate.

**System:** Shackles take one round to place on an immobilized foe. They cost two Corpus and one Pathos. A botched attempt at Shackles causes the Guard to lose the two points of Corpus as aggravated damage.

### •• Snare

This ability allows the Guardsman to directly cancel another's Argos abilities. It is often used to keep enemy leaders from fleeing the field of battle, or to trap escaping prisoners on the streets of Hell.

**System:** As long as the Guardsman is in physical contact with his opponent, the captive may not use any Argos without defeating the guard in an opposed Strength + Brawl roll.

### ••• Lariat

This ability is similar to **Shackle**, but may be used at a distance of up to 50 feet. The Guardsman distends part of his Corpus and hurls it at an opponent.

**System:** If the Guard succeeds on a Dexterity + Athletics roll, the target is captured as if by Shackles. This art costs one Pathos and two Corpus to use, and requires a round to prepare. Each 1 rolled is taken by the Guardsman as a level of regular damage.

### •••• Net

This ability resembles both Snare and Shackles, but can affect a group of targets. Net is, as its name suggests, a net woven from the Corpus of a Guardsman and flung up to 20 feet.

**System:** With an expenditure of 3 points of Pathos, the Guardsman produces a colorful web, a full 12 feet in diameter. The Guardsman then casts this net forth, using a Dexterity + Melee (difficulty 6) roll. Anyone with whom the net makes contact is completely entangled, as the fibers of the web will snake themselves around their victim. The Net ensnares the target so that she is entirely immobile. It requires a Strength + Brawl roll (difficulty 9) to break a strand of the Net, and it takes between 3 and 6 successes to escape. White Jade cannot cut the Net but True Jade can. A botch on a roll to create a Net costs the Guard 3 points of aggravated Corpus damage, as well as giving him two temporary Angst points.

## Chronicle Ideas

A wide variety of chronicles can be set in the Jade Kingdom, from the tempestuous events surrounding a powerful wraith family to the individual challenges of seeking P'eng Lai. Incorporating the Jade Kingdom into an existing Stygian chronicle offers new challenges and opportunities for players and Storytellers alike, whether the players are dealing with emissaries from Yu Huang, or somehow find themselves transported to the Yellow Springs. Below are some suggestions for possible stories.

**Family versus Family:** Families are always becoming embroiled in conflicts with other families, which is fertile ground for many stories. The troupe may want to establish a single family with a long-standing feud against another family. Conversely, a new family may rise to challenge the players' position in society. The players may be members of a new Communist family, trying to win influence away from an established traditional clan.

**Family versus Rebels:** Perhaps the family controls a lucrative soul-collecting franchise within the Conquered Territories. Rebels constantly harass the operations, and the players must protect their primary source of wealth and power. If the rebels are feeling particularly ambitious, they may attempt to cripple the operation at its source and strike at the family directly. Or, the family may decide that it's time to wipe out the pests once and for all, and sends the players' wraiths out into the field to deal with the problem.

**Family versus Government:** The family has been targeted for investigation by a Judge or Protector for some unspecified crime. The players must work to clear their family name and determine who accused them in the first place. Maybe it is just a greedy magistrate looking for bribes, but perhaps a rival family is secretly behind it. The order could even come from the Imperial Court, sending the players must go as far as the Jade Palace in their quest for justice. On the other hand, the family may well be



guilty of some crime, such as the selling of favors or black-market relics and souls. In this case the players must work to cover up their crimes, maybe by shifting the blame to a rival family.

**Imperiled Living Relatives:** The living members of the family are undergoing some sort of terrible ordeal, and the players must try to help them. The living offer ardent prayers and abundant sacrifices in their time of need, and if the family does not respond they are likely to gain a great deal of Angst. The troubles besetting the family can be purely terrestrial, such as a financial crisis, disease or war. However, the problems may well be of a supernatural origin: *kuei*, other wraiths, vampires or even mages.

**Family at Imperial Court:** The players may be representatives from their family to the Imperial Court. Perhaps they have just arrived, and are trying to obtain some special dispensation or favor from a highly placed magistrate. The players must learn the intricacies of court etiquette, and work to gain access to a magistrate or even the Emperor himself. Such access, they may learn, always comes with a price....

**Magistrates of the Imperial Government:** The players take on the roles of servants of the Emperor. This works best if one player plays a single magistrate and the other players play assistants and allies. It is also possible that the players play several different magistrates of approximately equal power. Matters of policy and intrigue are afoot, and the characters must work to preserve their positions, power and wealth, while working for the good of the Empire (of course).

**Magistrate versus Rebels/Criminals:** The magistrate and her assistants confront rebel and criminal activity in their region. A Protector might be called upon to investigate possible traitors within the Imperial Government, or a Censor might seek out a group of black-marketeers dealing in unregistered souls. For a more combat-oriented story, a Militia Commander might be called upon to root out a band of outlaw Buddhists operating in his district.

**Magistrates versus Magistrates:** Inter-magisterial rivalries are very common in the Jade Kingdom. Arguments over jurisdiction and influence often turn into protracted feuds. The players may be Protectors seeking to unmask a particularly corrupt official, or they could be caught between two feuding magistrates and must choose one side at risk of angering the other.

**The Business of Governing:** Classic-style mysteries involving a Judge and her assistants investigating a crime are a good start here. Magistrates also have influence to peddle, and players may be approached by those seeking to buy their loyalty.

**Magistrates at Court:** Higher level magistrates may be assigned to the Imperial Court in the Jade Palace. Here the players can become involved in the Byzantine politics surrounding the person of the Emperor, where the prizes of victory are huge but the punishments for failure are Hellish....

## Innocents Abroad

Many Storytellers may wish to adapt the Jade Kingdom to an already existing chronicle. There is certainly a great deal within Yu Huang's realm that players might find interesting. Of course, the Emperor himself is interested in the goings on in other Dark Kingdoms,

particularly Stygia since the disappearance of Charon. The players' first contact with the Jade Kingdom may well be with emissaries or spies sent by the Emperor.

**Emissaries:** The players are sent to the Jade Kingdom by the Hierarchy (or even a Renegade group) seeking an alliance with the Imperial Government, or perhaps they are seeking someone who fled to the Empire after causing trouble in Stygia. They must pursue their quarry across the unfamiliar landscape without offending the powers that be.

**Fugitives:** The players are on the run from authorities in Stygia, and seek refuge in the Jade Kingdom. The players must register with the local Censor and hope that they can find a family to sponsor them, otherwise they risk being sentenced to Hell and getting turned into a plant in the Imperial Gardens.

**Explorers:** Simple curiosity draws the players to the Jade Kingdom. Perhaps they seek to learn what teachings the Buddhists have to offer on the subject of Transcendence. The players may simply be explorers at heart, or drawn along to China when a living person whom they love gets a new job overseas. Of course, there are dark secrets to be uncovered here as well as light ones....

**Mercenaries:** A group of rebels in the Conquered Territories hires the players to help them overthrow the Emperor, or to liberate souls sentenced to Hell. Their unfamiliar Arcanoi and relics may give the players the upper hand at first, but the Empire has potent defenses against Stygian forces, which will inevitably be unleashed.

## Rebels

The oppressive conditions of the Jade Kingdom may well sit uneasily with players. Playing a band of rebels gives them the chance to try to do something about it. The players have declared war on Yu Huang and everything he stands for. Whether the players form their own resistance group or join an existing one, these chronicles are exciting if more than a little dangerous.

**Cry Freedom!:** The players are Chinese wraiths who find the Emperor's rule too oppressive to bear any longer. They may be part of a radical religious sect, fighting for the right to find their own way to Paradise, or souls who died in the burgeoning democracy movement. While the People's Republic of China may be totalitarian and inhumane, it is paradise compared to the hells of Yu Huang's domain. Those who fought dictatorship while alive will easily find a compelling cause once they come under the Emperor's yoke.

**Viva la Revolution:** The chronicle is set in the Conquered Territories, as the players fight for their freedom from eternal enslavement at the hands of Imperial Reapers. They must wage guerrilla warfare, trying to save the newly dead before the Imperial Collectors capture them. Rebels don't have the longevity of more settled wraiths, but for many Oblivion is better than slavery.

**A Bat Out of...:** Even if the Emperor's servants should capture the players, the adventure is not over. They must now try to escape from Hell itself before they are permanently transformed into a footstool for some provincial Governor. In the process they may try to free others from the horrors of Earth Prison, although many there are almost past hope....

# Dark Kingdom OF JADE™

## In the East, the Shadows are Lengthening

From Hunan to Hokkaido, the First Sovereign Emperor rules the lands of the dead. Ghostly watchmen peer over the haunted remnants of the Great Wall, while the Emperor's arm reaches into the very depths of Hell itself. Come, experience for yourself the wonders and the terrors of Qin Shihuang's realm. Just because you're dead doesn't mean that you've seen everything.

## Do You Dare Pit Your Will Against the Jade Emperor's?

The Dark Kingdom of Jade is the first Dark Kingdoms sourcebook for Wraith: the Oblivion. Containing everything necessary to run a Jade Kingdom chronicle, it is a complete source for information on the Chinese Shadowlands, as well as offering new information on the Conquered Territories, Hell, and the lands of the living.

### The Dark Kingdom of Jade features:

- The secrets behind the Emperor's Immortal Guard!
- New Arcanoi, Backgrounds, and more, all exclusive to the Empire of Jade!
- More information on dealing with the Quick, including geomancers, spirit mediums and exorcists!

